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BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING FAMILY HISTORY MAGAZINE

ISSUE 236 NOVEMBER 2025 £5.99

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How the experts uncover people who are missing from the records

INHERITING TRAUMA Can genealogy boost your mental health?

The Nazis stole my family's art and I want it returned

HEROES OF TRAFALGAR The harsh reality of life in Nelson's navy

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- Find lunatic asylum records
- Scan documents with this free app
- Uncovering my Welsh roots

This was Sylvia's promise to you...

A generation ago, a woman named Sylvia made a promise. As a doctor's secretary, she'd watched stroke destroy the lives of so many people. She was determined to make sure we could all live in a world where we're far less likely to lose our lives to stroke.

She kept her promise, and a gift to the Stroke Association was included in her Will. Sylvia's gift helped fund the work that made sure many more of us survive stroke now than did in her lifetime.

Sylvia changed the story for us all. Now it's our turn to change the story for those who'll come after us.

Stroke still shatters lives and tears families apart. And surviving a stroke is just the start of a long and gruelling recovery journey. If you or someone you love has been affected by stroke – you'll know just what that means.

You can change the story, just like Sylvia did, with a gift in your Will. All it takes is a promise.

You can promise future generations a world where researchers discover new treatments and surgeries, and stroke survivors and their families have the support to find the strength and determination they need to find their way back to life.

Your promise today gives strength for tomorrow. Please, leave a gift in your Will to the Stroke Association.

Find out how by calling 020 7566 1505 or email legacy@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Finding **strength** through **support**

Stroke Association

The Stroke Association is registered as a charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in the Isle of Man (No. 945) and Jersey (NPO 369), and operating as a charity in Northern Ireland.

Welcome

Sarah's Top Tip

Check all new online records, even if you think you know what they will say

News
Ancestry adds millions of Birmingham electoral registers

Over the years, I've done a lot of work on my Birmingham family. Although slightly hampered by the Green family's common surname, they luckily gave most sons the middle name Fiddian. So, when I saw that Ancestry had digitised the Birmingham electoral rolls (**page 10**), I wasn't expecting any surprises. I might have not even bothered to look. But there, sharing a 'qualification' of a warehouse address, along with a William Fiddian Green, was a William Frank Green. I still can't quite place him, but that will keep me busy for a few days and is making me question all my William F Green records.

Thinking outside the box is probably one of the most important skills a family historian can have, along with a questioning mind. Our ancestors are not always where we expect them to be – and who would want it otherwise? Chloe's excellent tips this month (**page 14**) will get you examining your family history puzzles from a different angle.

We also look this month at inherited trauma and whether understanding your family history can help improve your mental health (**page 19**). We would love to hear from readers who have found that understanding their family history has helped them. If your forebears struggled with mental illness, or had learning disabilities, you can find out more about asylum records on **page 28**.

Crime and punishment also feature this month, with an impressive round-up of websites that between them offer millions of records (**page 35**). And if you like a good podcast, you will love a new series coming to Radio 4 investigating one man's hunt for the artworks his family lost during the Holocaust (**page 22**).

Finally, I loved meeting readers at the recent Bristol & Avon Family History Society fair in Thornbury. Welcome to our new subscribers, and thank you to everyone who bought back issues or just came for a chat. I heard so many fascinating stories. Family history societies are a great way to learn, and share your passion. Join one today!

Sarah

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Contributors

Chloe O'Shea
Chloe is a genealogist as well as the author of *Tracing Your Staffordshire Ancestors*, reviewed on **page 70**. On **page 14** she shares some favourite tips for busting brick walls.

Claire Vaughan
Claire writes our 'Reader Story' every issue (**page 24**). This month she also looks into inherited trauma (**page 19**) and a sad tale from the Second World War (**page 22**).

Paul Blake
Although they're not technically a census, the Protestation Returns are the closest we get for England in the mid-17th century as genealogist Paul Blake explains on **page 38**.

COVER IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES/DAPHNE AND TONY BEACON PLAY HIDE-AND-SEEK IN HYDE PARK, LONDON, 15 OCTOBER 1931

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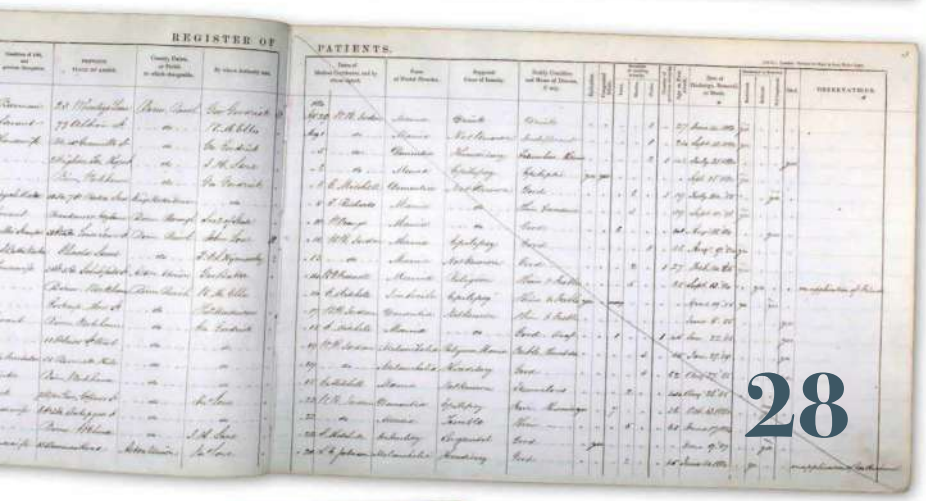

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WIN an AncestryDNA test kit from **ancestry.co.uk**
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The writer of our star letter wins an AncestryDNA test **worth £79** – so drop us a line and share your thoughts with us.

A Banner For A Hero

STAR LETTER

Thanks again for publishing the story of my rabble-rousing 'Family Hero', Maria Carr, in your February 2021 issue. As was mentioned in Gail Dixon's article, a banner to commemorate the people and events that were instrumental in the formation of north-east England's first recognisable mining union was being planned.

The banner was finally revealed this summer and featured representations of Tommy Hepburn, Elizabeth Parkin, William Jobling, Cuthbert Skipsey, the Seven Men of Jarrow, and, of course, my 3x great grandmother (reimagined from a photo of her granddaughter Maria Gillet).

Maria has now become the second member of this Carr family line to be immortalised on a banner – her grandson, my great granduncle Thomas Carr, featured on the Brandon Lodge banner (which went missing sometime after the Second World War; any new pictures or information on its whereabouts will be gratefully received).

I was privileged to carry the new banner through the streets of Durham when it made its first appearance at the Big Meeting (139th Durham Miners' Gala) in July, marking the bicentenary of the founding of The Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland. It received many compliments and will hopefully help to raise awareness of the exploits, struggles and personal sacrifices that were vital in raising the living standards of a huge proportion of the British working class.

Much of the credit for the banner's creation must go to mining historian David Douglass, who has also written a very informative book (sharing its title with the union) about the movement's early days.

Any other descendants of those featured on the banner would be more than welcome to join us at next year's event(s). Until then, "The Union Forever!"

Richard Carr, by email

Richard *(right)* carries the banner featuring his inspirational relation through the streets of Durham

Editor Replies **It's so good to see Maria being remembered. If any readers are related to the people on the banner, do let us know.**

OFF THE RECORD

Gone Much Too Soon

In other words, almost one in five Preston babies was doomed

Alan Crosby's article in our September issue prompted Ged to get in touch

Hurray For Officer Of Health Reports

Alan Crosby's column headlined "Gone Much Too Soon" in the September issue highlights the devastating rates of infant mortality in earlier generations. Susan McGuire expanded on this in an article she wrote for the Washington History Society called "Killer Cures for Teething", which is on the society's website: **www.washingtonhistorysociety.co.uk/community/washington-history-society-12965/killer-cures-for-teething/**. In it she revealed the shocking remedies once used to soothe babies' teething pain. These included dangerous folk treatments like leeches, chicken grease, hog's hair and hare's brains, alongside widely advertised patent medicines containing opium, cocaine, mercury, morphine and alcohol.

Alan references the 1903 Medical Officer of Health report for Preston. This is part of a vast archive of annual public health reports produced by local authorities across England and Wales from the late 19th century to 1972. These reports are freely available online via the Wellcome Collection's site: **wellcomecollection.org/collections**. To locate a specific town's records, search using the town name followed by 'Borough', 'Urban', or 'Rural' to narrow the search results and access downloadable PDFs.

These reports are a gold mine for social historians, typically including local statistics and death tables, causes of death and prevalent infectious diseases, reports on public health issues and sanitation, as well as commentary and analysis from the Medical Officer of Health.

Smaller towns often produced reports of 25–30 pages, while those for larger boroughs and cities could exceed 75 pages, sometimes including port health or school health sections.

Though these reports were publicly presented to councils and often summarised in local newspapers, their tone was often critical of residents' behaviours in language that, as Alan says, could be strikingly moralistic.

Yet the reports also document steady improvements in public health: the crackdown on food adulteration, the replacement of condemned housing, and the installation of proper water and sewage systems.

And what of children's teeth? From the First World War era onward, survival rates improved significantly as the Health Visitor service expanded – and the deadly folklore remedies finally faded into history.

I strongly recommend family historians use this resource to understand the living conditions of their ancestors.

Ged Parker, Tyne and Wear

Editor Replies You are absolutely right Ged, these reports can add some fascinating historical context to our research. I often check them if a relative's child has died of an infectious disease.

Barbara Whyler commented on our guide to tracing nonconformist ancestors: tinyurl.com/wdytya-noncon
My grandad's family went to the "chapel". I do not know which kind but the local Church of England refused entry to people wearing clogs!

Living A Double Life

In 2023 I contacted the magazine with a query over my great great grandparents and their 'disappearance' from the 1911 census. The researcher suggested that they may have been in the workhouse, as some of the children were in charity schools. Now, over two years later, I've partly solved the mystery.

Recently I renewed my access to the British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) and the website helped me to answer the question as to where my great great grandfather Luke Mizon was in 1911.

It turns out Luke was living with another woman for all intents and purposes as 'husband and wife', not far from where the original family home was! I came across this news in a report about a theft. After falling out with his second 'wife', he met up with his actual wife Catherine and they robbed a number of items from this woman, who then caught Luke and Catherine together with her furniture and reported them to the police. Luke was subsequently arrested, and sent to Tottenham Prison for a month's hard labour.

He came out in October time 1914, and subsequently joined the Army in December 1914 by lying about his age – he was roughly 10 years older than he claimed to be. I'd always thought he was quite heroic for joining the Army, like his son, but my opinion now sways – did he join because he had nowhere else to go?

Further newspaper reports suggest both of my great great grandparents were unsavoury characters who were violent to each other. Catherine is described as an alcoholic who had "pawned nearly everything in the house".

In light of this, I would not be surprised to stumble across future records to say their children (including my great grandmother Florence) were sent away from them for this reason.

While I don't know exactly where Catherine was in 1911, I do know that the couple were reunited after the First World War and were together in 1921 and looking after their grandson… I can only imagine that was because he was illegitimate. I'd already discovered false records about the child's birth, and his mother must have been working and trying to avoid any discredit to her reputation.

My next hunt now is for more photographs. I've yet to see a photo of Luke, and I do wonder what he looked like. I may just have to find someone to help, so I can finalise this story.

Sarah Welsh, by email

Editor Replies Yes, it's important to realise that our ancestors won't all be people we can be proud of. Good luck with your search for photographs!

Alleged Theft of Furniture.

At the Enfield Petty Session, on Monday, Luke Mizon (54), labourer, of Arthur-road, Tottenham, was charged with stealing, on August 28th, from 3, Lincoln-road, Tottenham, a washstand, curtain, bath, and cupboard, value together 15s., the property of Sarah Hill, of 3, Lincoln-road; further, with stealing, on the same date, from outside that address, a cushion and a perambulator cover, value 3s., the property of Chas. Haynes, of the same address.—Mrs. Hills said that the prisoner had been living with her for three years as her husband. She told him some time ago she would be glad to get rid of him because of his behaviour to her daughters. On August 22nd she removed her furniture upstairs into an empty room and the prisoner stayed in the downstairs flat until the Monday. On Friday she heard he and his wife had broken into the place and taken away the goods mentioned in the charge. A little later she met him and his wife in Chesnut-road with them on a barrow. She subsequently gave him into custody.—The accused was remanded to Tottenham. — At yesterday's Court he was sentenced to a month's hard labour.

Sarah found this article about her scandalous ancestors in the edition of the *Tottenham and Edmonton Weekly Herald* published on 4 September 1914

Grace Note

I always enjoy the stories shared by other readers, but the one in the September issue was especially interesting. Emily Cook's story of her relationship to Grace Darling struck a particular chord with me, as my wife's tree also includes Grace. My wife is descended from Grace's maternal aunt Mary Reed Horsley.

Although Grace never married or had children of her own, there are many people proud to claim a connection with the heroine of the Farne Islands.

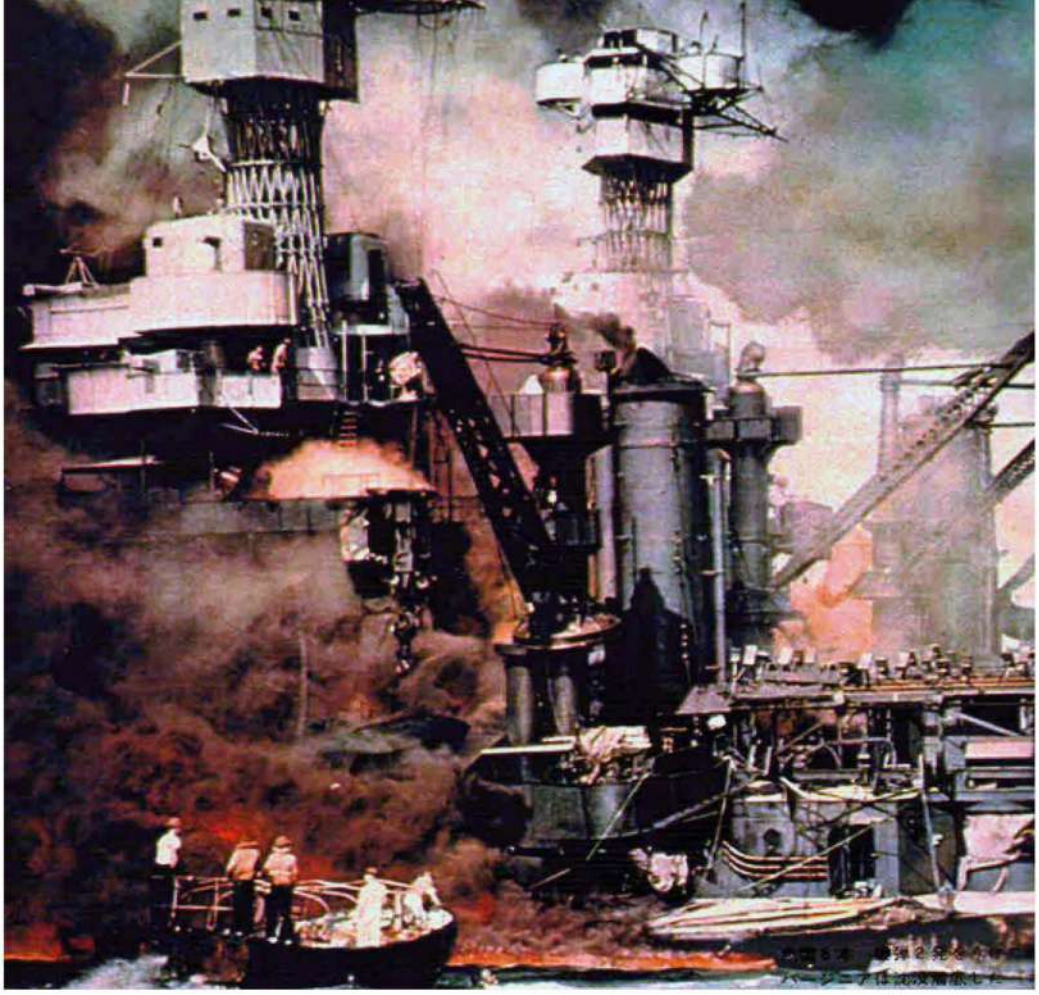
I can certainly endorse Emily's recommendation of the RNLI museum in Bamburgh (**tinyurl.com/rnli-mus-gd**).

Emily's story has reignited my interest in researching my wife's family tree, and I have followed up on several of the branches that I had previously not examined.

Thanks for a fascinating issue, and I look forward to next month!

Alan Shout, by email

Emily's story has reignited my interest in researching my wife's family tree



David has provided additional information regarding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941

Editor Replies I'm glad you enjoy our 'Reader Story' section. May your reignited interest lead to exciting discoveries of your own.

The Mistakes Of War

The article in the September issue about VJ Day doesn't tell the whole truth about Pearl Harbor. The Americans made the cardinal sin of lining up their aircraft on the tarmac next to each other, so they could be picked off one by one. The report of Japanese mini submarines getting through the security nets was not passed to senior staff, senior staff were out horseriding or about to play golf, and the radar was turned off just after 7am, minutes before the attacks. At the end of the war the American authorities produced the report of their inquiry into their attack. There are two copies at The National Archives at Kew (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**) in series ADM 1, where one British Admiralty official asked whether the Americans would learn anything from Pearl Harbor and the answer was "probably not".

Britain did no better pointing the big guns out to sea at Singapore as the Japanese "would not attack by land", which they did, leading to the biggest ever British surrender in military history. Emperor Hirohito could have stopped the war if he wanted to, as he was revered as a god. Even today Japanese people still visit the shrines of war criminals like Tojo to give thanks. We should also not forget the civilians who were captured, abused and died.
David Matthew, by email

Editor Replies Thank you David. The war in the Far East certainly affected many thousands of civilians as well as soldiers.

@canerdiangirl.bsky.social responded to our tips on the *Police Gazette*: tinyurl.com/wdytya-pol-gaz
My family crew includes more than a few scofflaws and miscreants, low-dive East Enders down on the luck they never had. I'm looking forward to searching this resource! #genealogy

TV Memories

Sarah Le Marchand's account of her family's survival during the Germans' occupation of Jersey ('Reader Story', August) reminded me of a TV programme when I was very young. Set in the Channel Islands, it featured a brave local family and was, I think, made for children's TV. In one scene an enemy soldier searching for a hidden radio was distracted by a quick-thinking girl who asked him for help with her German homework. Does anyone else remember the programme?
Maggie Cobbett, by email

Editor Replies Thanks Maggie. I'm sure our readers will help you!

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What's On

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Don't miss Huddersfield & District Family History Society's annual fair

Family & Local History Fair

25 October
a Greenhead Masonic Hall, Huddersfield
e *secretary@hdfhs.org.uk*
w **hdfhs.org.uk/the-family-history-fair/**

A photograph from one of the society's previous fairs

Huddersfield & District Family History Society says that its fair has something for everyone interested in family or local history, no matter their level of experience. The expert talks will be 'How to Research Your House's History' by Ian Stevenson, 'Yorkshire Folk on Holiday in the Early 20th Century' by Christine Leveridge, and 'A Walk Around Huddersfield in Old Postcards' by Chris Smith. There will also be stands from family history societies, local history societies and other organisations; transcribed Huddersfield parish registers, census booklets and CDs available to buy; and society members on hand to help you with your research queries. £5.

IN PERSON

Homes For Heroes: Centenary Of The Ex-Servicemen's Houses at Cregagh

9 October
a Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Belfast
t 028 9053 4800
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-proni-homes**
This talk will look at the history of the houses for veterans of the First World War that were built in Northern Ireland. Free.

RTFHS 'On The Road' Get-Together

11 October
a Chesham Town Hall
e *enquiries@rtfhs.org.uk*
w **rtfhs.org.uk/event/rtfhs-family-history-open-day-live-event/**
The Romany & Traveller Family History Society presents this drop-in event for those interested in Romany, Traveller, fairground and circus family history. Free.

Off To The Workhouse

15 October
a Ecgwins Club, Evesham
t 07871 285606
w **eveshamfestivalofwords.org/event/off-to-the-workhouse/**
In this talk historian Richard Churchley paints a picture of the way the poor were treated by the authorities from Elizabethan times through to the 20th century. £11.

'The Ark' – Wedgwood And European Refugees, 1933–1945

21 October
a The Wiener Holocaust Library, London
t 020 7636 7247
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-wiener-ark**
Michael Ruddy from the V&A Wedgwood Collection reveals how the Wedgwood family tried to help refugees escape the Nazis. Free.

The German Occupation Of The Channel Islands In WW2

21 October
a St George's Hall, Poole
t 01202 785623
w **tinyurl.com/dorsetfhs-chan**
James Porter will deliver this talk, which has been arranged by Dorset Family History Society. £3.

OFHS Family History Fair

25 October
a Cherwell School, Oxford
t 01865 358151
w **ofhs.uk/whats-on/fairs/ofhs-family-history-fair-2025-2**
This Oxfordshire Family History Society event includes stalls from family history societies and the Guild of One-Name Studies. Free.

SLHF Annual Conference: Popular Protest

25 October
a The Wynd Centre, Paisley
e *stephenconnelly@btinternet.com*
w **slhf.org/event/slhf-annual-conference-popular-protest**
Learn more about the history of protest in Scotland with this event organised by the Scottish Local History Forum. £35.

David Olusoga: A Gun Through Time

Starts 2 November
a Various locations
w **tinyurl.com/uktw-olusoga**
In this tour the historian will tell the stories of three firearms that changed the world. Venues include London, Chester and Edinburgh. Various prices.

IN PERSON & ONLINE

A New History Of Women's Work

9 October
a Somerset Rural Life Museum, Glastonbury
t 01458 831197
w **swheritage.org.uk/events/a-new-history-of-womens-work/**
Prof. Jane Whittle will discuss the working lives of women during the Tudor and Stuart periods. £10 in person, or from £5 online.

ONLINE

Pharos Tutors

Various dates
w **pharostutors.com**
Upcoming courses from Pharos Tutors include 'First Steps to a One-Place Study' with Janet Few (starts 13 October, lasts five weeks) and 'Manorial Records for Family and Local Historians' with Joe Saunders (starts 20 October, lasts five weeks). Various prices.

Maps For Genealogists

Starts 20 October
w **portal.sog.org.uk/Event/view/1021886**
This four-week course will show you how to make the most of online maps when researching your family history. £40 for members of the Society of Genealogists, otherwise £50.

Schools Of Thought: Education Records For Family Historians

29 October
w **customer.surreycc.gov.uk/surrey-heritage-upcoming-events**
Surrey Heritage has organised this online talk, which will be delivered over Zoom. £6.

BOOK AHEAD

Discover more about the history of London's music halls

Centre Stage: Music Hall At The London Archives

1 November
a The London Archives
t **020 7332 3820**
w **tinyurl.com/eventbrite-tla-music-hall**
This one-day event will showcase TLA's collections and feature talks by experts on music-hall history. There will also be the chance to find out how to trace music-hall forebears. £30.

HUDDERSFIELD & DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

News

Rosemary Collins reports on the latest data releases and genealogy news

Ancestry adds millions of Birmingham electoral registers

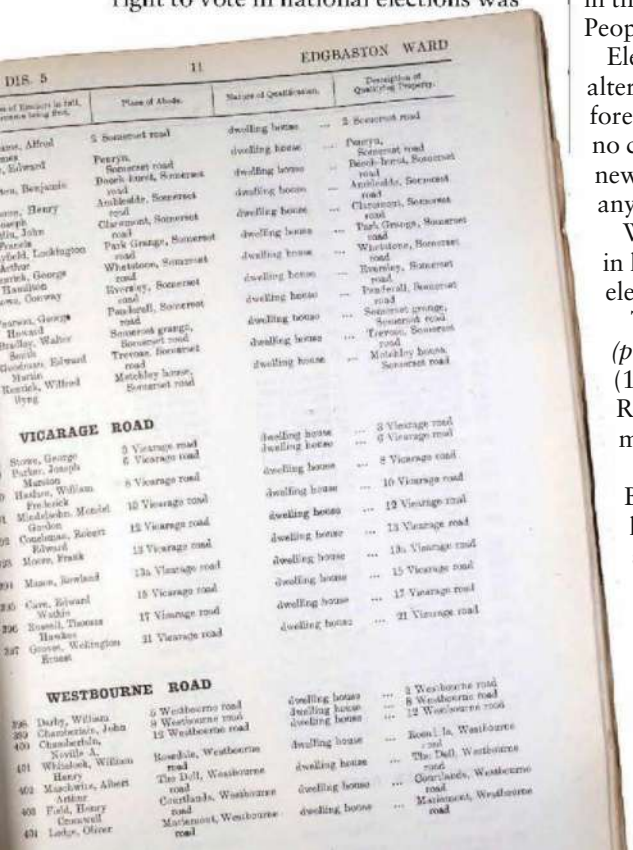
Family history website Ancestry (ancestry.co.uk) has added a major new collection of 49,105,506 electoral register records from Birmingham, dating from 1833–1972 and featuring notable residents, from former prime minister Neville Chamberlain to heavy-metal legend Ozzy Osbourne.

Electoral registers are lists of eligible voters. They include information about individuals such as their name, address and how they were qualified to vote.

They were first introduced following the 1832 Reform Act, which was passed to address campaigns for greater voting rights for the population of newly industrialised cities such as Birmingham. The Act greatly increased the number of voters by granting suffrage to small landowners, tenant farmers, shopkeepers, and all householders who paid a yearly rental of £10 or more, although only to men.

Voting rights were further expanded in the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts. The right to vote in national elections was finally granted to some women (and to all men) in the 1918 Reform Act, and voting rights were granted to all women in the 1928 Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act.

An engraving depicting Birmingham city centre during the 19th century



EDGBASTON WARD

VICARAGE ROAD

WESTBOURNE ROAD

Electoral registers are a useful alternative for showing where our forebears lived in years where there are no census records available, and the new registers are a major resource for anyone with Birmingham ancestry.

Women who were eligible to vote in local elections may also appear on electoral registers before 1918.

The 1912–1913 electoral register *(pictured)* shows Neville Chamberlain (1869–1940) living at 12 Westbourne Road. He served as the British prime minister from 1937 to 1940.

Chamberlain was born in Birmingham, and spent much of his life there. His father Joseph served as the city's mayor before becoming one of its MPs. Neville Chamberlain had his start in politics when he was elected to Birmingham City Council in 1911, and became lord mayor in 1915.

Although not a census, electoral registers can reveal other adults who were living at the same address. For example, Communist campaigner Jessie Eden (1902–1986) appears in the 1945 register for Handsworth, living at 143 Heathfield Road with fellow Communist Party activist Walter McCulloch, who she married three years later.

Eden was an active trade unionist who first became involved in politics during the 1926 General Strike. She played a big part in unionising female workers, leading 10,000 women on strike in 1931. A fictional representation of Eden appeared in the BBC drama series *Peaky Blinders* played by Charlie Murphy.

Electoral rolls can also help trace people's movements. Black Sabbath vocalist John Michael 'Ozzy' Osbourne (1948–2025) was registered with his parents and two siblings at 14 Lodge Road in 1970 and 1971. Described as his "childhood home", it's interesting to note that he was still living there at 23. He married Thelma Riley that year, and in 1972 he is living with her at 19 Templefield Square, Edgbaston.

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NEWS IN BRIEF

The 1904 Crockford's Clerical Directory

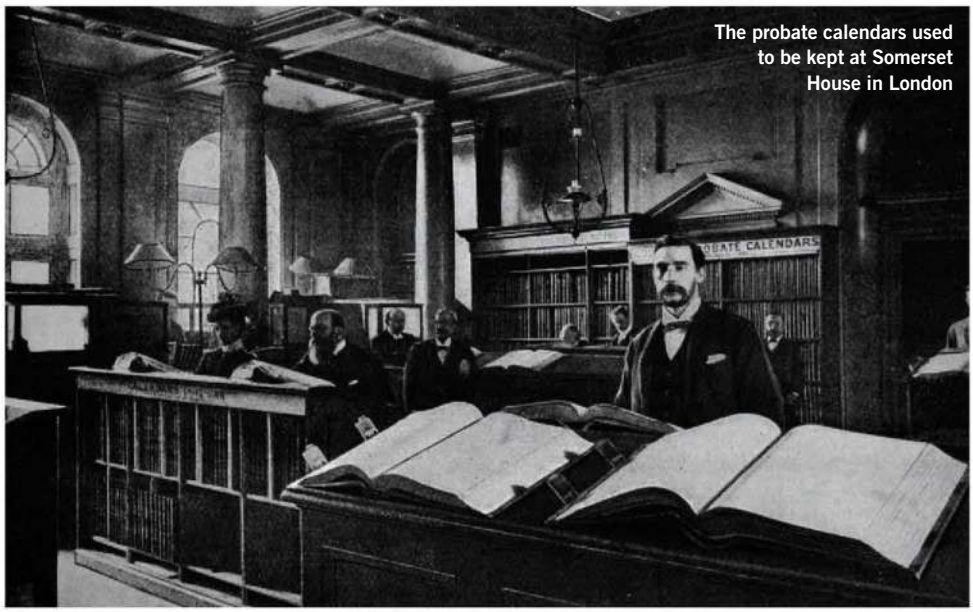
TheGenealogist adds over 500,000 clerical records

TheGenealogist (**thegenealogist.co.uk**) has released more than half a million records of Anglican and Methodist clergy, dating from 1890–1952. The records added to the family history site include Crockford's Clerical Directories from 1904, 1923, 1927 and 1933; *Ministers and Probationers of the Methodist Church* (revised to August 1952), which provides chronological and alphabetical lists of ministers and probationers from the Wesleyan, Primitive and United Methodist branches; and the London Diocesan Clergy Succession, which lists the bishops of London.

Bombay on the Malabar Coast, 1754

FIBIS adds probate records to its online database

The Families in British India Society (FIBIS) has added transcriptions of 3,620 early probate records of the British in India to its database (**search.fibis.org/bin/index.php**). The transcriptions are of the indexes to the accountant's general records in the India Office collections in the British Library (**bl.uk**). They cover Bengal (1704–1779), Bombay (1728–1783) and Madras (1753–1779). Researchers can view the transcriptions and look up the full record at the library if they find an ancestor's name in the indexes.



The probate calendars used to be kept at Somerset House in London

Free UK Genealogy reveals plans for probate website

Free UK Genealogy, the charity behind the family history sites FreeBMD (freebmd.org.uk/), FreeREG (freereg.org.uk) and FreeCEN (freecen.org.uk), has announced plans for a site featuring probate records.

Denise Colbert, chief operating officer of Free UK Genealogy, said that the charity aims to digitise a set of 800 books of probate calendars, dating from 1853 (shortly before the introduction of civil probate registration in 1858) to 1943.

Richard Light, the volunteer who is responsible for FreePRO's technical development, said that the volumes will be transcribed using optical character recognition (OCR), then other volunteers will check the transcriptions.

"We are trying to keep very close to our slogan of 'Human transcription for family history data' ", Colbert explained.

"We feel like that's something that sets us apart from the bigger boys."

She also said that FreePRO will offer a more sophisticated search facility than the one available on the Government's Find a Will website (**probatesearch.service.gov.uk/**).

Free UK Genealogy hopes that the new website will launch in 2026.

The charity is seeking to raise £40,000 to fund the initial digitisation of the books, including through participating in the fundraising campaign The Big Give's 2025 Christmas Challenge (**biggive.org/christmas-challenge/**).

CAN YOU HELP?

The Great Northern Railway Society (**gnrsociety.com**) wants to hear from anybody whose relation worked for the Great Northern Railway (GNR). GNR received its first Act of Parliament in 1846, and existed as an independent company until the end of 1922 when it was subsumed into the new London and North Eastern Railway. No staff records created by the GNR exist, because they were all destroyed during the Blitz in 1941. The society is endeavouring to plug the gap by creating a database of company employees using surviving records, including trade-union records, newspapers and census records, and has found 26,500 people so far. If a member of your extended family worked for the company, please get in touch with the society by emailing *genealogy@gnrsociety.com*.

Hitchin Station in Hertfordshire opened in 1850, although this photo was taken c1905

GETTY IMAGES | GNR SOCIETY/BOB DARBY

TNA discovers will from Shakespeare family legal dispute

A 1642 will at the centre of a family legal dispute about a house that belonged to William Shakespeare has been discovered at The National Archives at Kew (TNA; nationalarchives.gov.uk).

The will, made by Thomas Nash on 25 August 1642, was found in a box of 17th-century documents from the Court of Chancery.

Thomas Nash (1593–1647) was the husband of Elizabeth Hall (1608–1670), Shakespeare's granddaughter. The couple lived in New Place, a house in Stratford that Shakespeare purchased in 1597. In his will, Nash left the house to his cousin, Edward Nash.

However, Nash had no right to bequeath the house since it had been left by Shakespeare in his will to his daughter Susanna, Elizabeth's mother, who was still alive at the time and also living in New Place.

As a result Susanna and Elizabeth decided to obtain a legal document confirming that they still held Shakespeare's estates.

Edward Nash then took Elizabeth to court over the ownership of New Place.

Thomas Nash's will from 25 August 1642 bequeathed a property once owned by William Shakespeare *(inset)*

Records of Irish schools released

Family history site Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has added 728,466 school records from County Mayo and County Sligo (1802–1928). The collection is one of the most significant sources of Irish school records online. It includes registers, roll books, exam rolls and supplementary rolls. It contains useful information about the pupils such as their age, date of birth, residence, names and professions of parents, religion, and entry date into the school. The records were created to document attendance and provide statistics for grant applications to the Commissioners for National Education, formed in 1831 to administer funds for educating the poor in Ireland, and with effect from 1922 the Minister of Education.

A Rathnamagh National School register

John Gwilt

The recipient of a 1955 letter found in a garden in Torquay has been identified (**tinyurl.com/bbc-gwilt**)

240 years

The age of the oldest material in the Scottish Cricket Archive, which has now been donated to the National Library of Scotland (**tinyurl.com/indie-crick**)

Dame Vera Lynn

The singer's first audition tapes are being released 90 years later (**tinyurl.com/bbc-vera**)

Gretna Green

A century after her great grandparents eloped, Amber Chapell married in the same spot on the same date (**tinyurl.com/news-star-gret**)

1,300 years

The age of the skeletons of two people who died in southern Britain who DNA testing has revealed had sub-Saharan African ancestry (**tinyurl.com/live-science-sah**)

One of the letters included in the collection

PhD student's family history collection digitised

More than 600 letters, photos and papers showing a powerful British family's role in the slave trade are now being digitised by the University of Cambridge.

The material was collected over 20 years by Malik Al Nasir, who is studying for a PhD at the university based upon his genealogical research.

Al Nasir was inspired to research the family-run trading company Sandbach Tinne & Co. after discovering that he is descended from the Sandbach Tinne dynasty and those whom they enslaved in Guiana.

He said, "As it grew, what is now the Sandbach Tinne Collection began to reveal an astonishing family who criss-crossed Scotland, England, Australia, India, the Americas, the Caribbean and beyond, encapsulating the complexity, cunning and callousness of the British Empire and its chief source of income – slavery.

"Each familial line presented new narrative trajectories that were harrowing in their subject matter. The flippancy with which they discussed African people's miserable plight, and how they accounted for such people in financial statements as among their 'livestock' haunted me."

Some of the material in the collection can already be viewed at **viewer.cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/collections/sandbachtinne/21.**

GETTY IMAGES | THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES | SANDBACH TINNE COLLECTION

A Right Royal To-Do

Alan Crosby reveals how Charles II's visit to Norfolk affected the local community

Charles II visited Norfolk in September 1671, accompanied by other members of the royal family and a large retinue of gentlemen and servants. Royal visits were a great rarity in the 17th century, as was the case almost until our own times – the difficulties of travel, the complications of making arrangements, and maybe a lack of enthusiasm all contributed to the infrequency of these occasions. Elizabeth I was famous for her 'progresses', which were slow tours around the south, east and Midlands of England (never to the north or further west) – she enjoyed the journeys, which were relatively effortless for her because she was in a coach or open carriage, or even a litter carried by strong young men! But later monarchs were far more reluctant to go on tour, so Charles II's visit to East Anglia in 1671 was a cause of fascination and excitement.

At Alburgh, a small parish in south Norfolk near the Suffolk border, the vicar wrote in the parish register: "Memorandum: That on Wednesday September the 27 1671 King Charles the Second did come through Harlston In his progress to Yarmouth and from thence to Norwich." Harleston was the small market town nearby, and I am sure that the vicar went there for the day to see the king, and wrote this record of the occasion as soon as he got home – it's dated that very day.

Many locals might be drafted in as servants or stablehands

At Blickling, just outside Aylsham in north Norfolk, they were awaiting the royal party with even more excitement. Blickling Hall, a fabulous Jacobean house, was the home of the Hobart family, who were prominent in county and regional politics, and the king was honouring them with a visit.

Again, the incumbent recorded the occasion in the parish register. The king, with Queen Catherine, James, Duke of York (the king's brother and heir to the throne), the Dukes of Monmouth, Richmond and Buckingham, "with diverse Lords… came unto and dined at Sir John Hobart's" in the great dining room and the great parlour (too many of them to fit in one huge room!), before going their separate ways, the queen and her party to Norwich, the king and his men to Oxnead Hall, home of the Paston family, where they stayed the night. A special banqueting hall had been built there, to accommodate the illustrious guests. And the next day to Raynham Hall, to be hosted by Lord Townshend – and so it went on.

What of the ordinary people? Word would spread that the king and queen were due to visit the area, and in the places where they were expected to dine or spend the night the frantic preparations would be an object of great interest to local people, perhaps awed by the drama and extravagance of it all. Like extras on a film set, many locals might be drafted in to act as temporary servants or stablehands, and local tradesmen would hope for a bonus in providing goods and services.

I have many Norfolk ancestors who were around at this time, some of them living just down the road from Raynham Hall, which the king and queen visited at the very end of September 1671. They can never have seen the sovereign before, and only knew approximately what he looked like from the stylised portraits on coins – during Charles II's reign low-value copper coins (halfpennies and farthings) were minted for the first time. Did my forebears set out at dawn, crossing the fields and walking down the narrow lanes, with a throng of others, to catch a glimpse of the royal party?

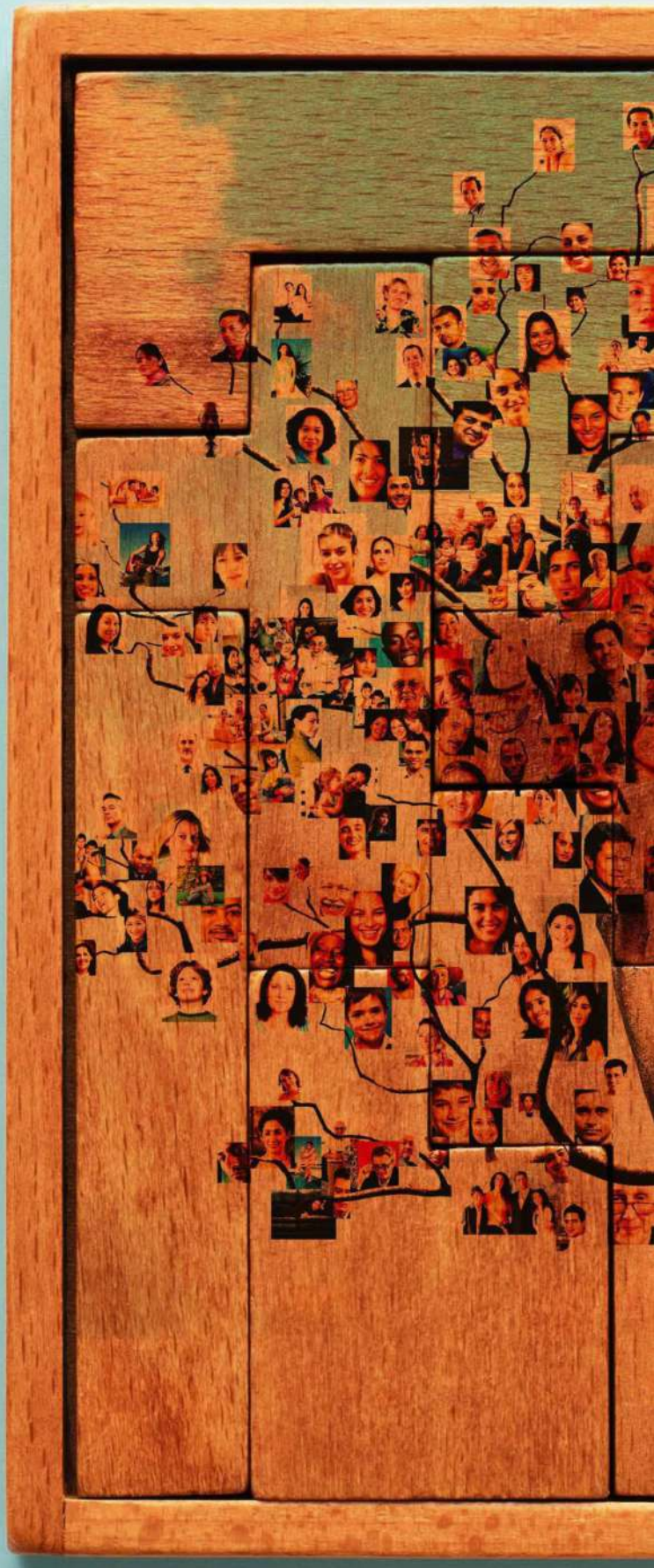
I like to think that my ancestors were there, that the king bowed graciously to them, that the childless queen smiled at the children, that the family went home to their cottage filled with excitement, those few minutes in the presence of almost godlike figures leaving lifelong memories of an exceptional occasion. I can never know, but I can dream!

ALAN CROSBY lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*

ILLUSTRATION WWW.SUEGENT.COM

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

If you've hit a brick wall in your research, don't lose hope! There are plenty of new strategies to try, says **Chloe O'Shea**



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Most of us have unfortunate brick walls in our family trees – those frustrating relations who seem to have appeared into the world as if from nowhere. Perhaps a person does not feature in the baptism registers for the place they stated they were born in. Maybe when asked their birthplace they said "not known". These elusive forebears can take up much of our research time, and it is easy to feel as though you have exhausted every possible research option. In situations like these, it can often help to think outside the box.

For example, a common reason for being unable to track a baptism for an ancestor in England or Wales is because their parents were nonconformists. You won't find a baptism in the regular parish registers for a person who was not baptised in a Church of England church. You may find a baptism record for them in nonconformist registers, but not all survive and, for some denominations, registers were seldom kept.

The following tips will give you lots of new avenues to explore, but a word of caution: just because two people share a surname within the same area does not mean that they are close family members. Researching this new lead and their family tree may lead you back in a roundabout way to your forebear and prove their ancestry, or you may end up exposing it as a red herring. Combining your DNA results with documentary evidence can help to prove a suspected link.

Researching in this way not only involves thinking outside of the box, but also extracting as much information as you can from the sources that you already have for your ancestor. Delving deeper into familiar records, such as wills and marriage registers, can resolve mysteries that have been hidden for generations – and few discoveries are as satisfying.

1 Make The Most Of Marriage Registers

Marriage registers give the names of at least two witnesses from 1754 onwards. These are often relatives of the bride or groom, so it is worth tracing these individuals to see if they are members of your ancestor's family. They may alternatively be friends, neighbours or parish officials. The latter is more obvious, because you will notice the same names appearing as witnesses in other marriages in the parish around the same time.

Using marriage registers to find your forebear's potential siblings can also be a great way of breaking down a brick wall. Siblings often married within the same parish or a neighbouring parish. Look for marriages within a five-mile radius of people with the same surname as your ancestor, and within 10 years of their marriage date. If there are no results then you can broaden these filters. Once a potential sibling has been discovered, research their family tree forwards and backwards to see if any results appear to positively confirm their relationship.

You may find that while your relation married prior to civil registration, their sibling married after 1837 in which case their father will be named on the marriage certificate. Remember to trace details of the witnesses to their marriages also.

A satirical etching of an unequal wedding by James Gillray, 1796

2 LOOK DEEPER INTO WILLS

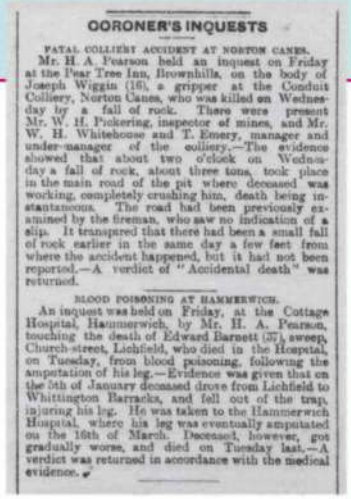
If you have found a will for your brick-wall forebear, ensure that you have researched everyone named within it, whether you believe that they are a relative or not. This includes beneficiaries and executors. My ancestor Samuel Blundell of Buckinghamshire named Stephen Warwick of Northamptonshire as one of his executors in his will of 1816. By researching Stephen's life I discovered that he was the Baptist minister of Roade Chapel. This led me to uncover the nonconformist records of my Blundell family from a chapel in a different county to where he was living.

If you have not found a will for your relation, or if they did not write one, try searching for wills of others with their surname in the same area. It may be that if they are siblings or cousins your ancestor will be named, along with how they are related. This is usually seen when the testator is unmarried and has no children. The will of Aaron Cock of Cholesbury, Buckinghamshire, was written in 1773 and names his brothers and his eight nieces and nephews, including my ancestor Mary Cock. This helped me to knock down a brick wall simply by finding a will that belonged to a person who had the same surname in her home parish.

Where wills are available online, such as Ancestry's collection for Dorset (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2119**), you can browse by parish. By filtering down to the dates when your relative was alive, you may discover someone naming them in their will.

This is the Last Will and Testament of me Elizabeth Brice of Taunton in the County of Somerset Widow First I give One hundred pounds to my Niece Louisa Maxwell the Wife of Mr William Maxwell and Daughter of Mr James Brice of Taunton aforesaid Carrier And I give to my Niece Mary Anne Allen the Wife of Mr Henry Allen of Taunton And I give devise bequeath and appoint my Dwellinghouse situate in the East side of Fore Street in Taunton aforesaid and all other my hereditaments and real Estate and all the residue and remainder of my money and chattels for money goods chattels personal Estate and effects and all property which I have power to dispose of unto my Niece Emily Brice who now resides with me and is the Youngest Daughter of the said James Brice To hold the same unto and to the use of my said Niece Emily Brice her heirs Executors Administrators and assigns absolutely And I direct that the Legacies money and personal Estate hereby given to my said Nieces Louisa Maxwell Mary Anne Allen and Emily Brice respectively shall be for the sole and separate use of them so are now or may hereafter be married and shall be without power to dispose of as they respectively shall think proper All the said Legacies and devises unto the said Emily Brice and her heirs All such Tenements and hereditaments as at my decease shall be vested in me as a Mortgagee or Trustee subject to the Trusts and equities affecting the same respectively And I appoint the said Emily Brice Sole Executrix of this my Will And I revoke all former Wills In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand the twenty eighth day of September One thousand eight hundred and sixty five — Elizabeth Brice (seal) — Signed and Published by the above named Elizabeth Brice the Testatrix as her last Will and Testament in the presence of us (present at the same time) who in her presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names as Witnesses — Wm Baker Taunton Solicitor — J. H. Beale his Clerk.

WELLCOME COLLECTION



CORONER'S INQUESTS

FATAL COLLIERY ACCIDENT AT NORTON CANES.

Mr. H. A. Pearson held an inquest on Friday at the Pear Tree Inn, Brownhills, on the body of Joseph Wiggin (16), a gripper at the Conduit Colliery, Norton Canes, who was killed on Wednesday by a fall of rock. There were present Mr. W. H. Pickering, inspector of mines, and Mr. W. H. Whitehouse and T. Emery, manager and under-manager of the colliery.—The evidence showed that about two o'clock on Wednesday a fall of rock, about three tons, took place in the main road of the pit where deceased was working, completely crushing him, death being instantaneous. The road had been previously examined by the fireman, who saw no indication of a slip. It transpired that there had been a small fall of rock earlier in the same day a few feet from where the accident happened, but it had not been reported.—A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

BLOOD POISONING AT HAMMERWICH.

An inquest was held on Friday, at the Cottage Hospital, Hammerwich, by Mr. H. A. Pearson, touching the death of Edward Barnett (37), sweep, Church-street, Lichfield, who died in the Hospital, on Tuesday, from blood poisoning, following the amputation of his leg.—Evidence was given that on the 5th of January deceased drove from Lichfield to Whittington Barracks, and fell out of the trap, injuring his leg. He was taken to the Hammerwich Hospital, where his leg was eventually amputated on the 16th of March. Deceased, however, got gradually worse, and died on Tuesday last.—A verdict was returned in accordance with the medical evidence.

3 Uncover Sources Hidden In Plain Sight

We often read how important it is to extract as much information as possible from every source. Sometimes this involves looking a little deeper. You may have found your brick-wall ancestor in the 1921 census, but been disappointed that this showed no clues as to their parentage. However, the 1921 census should also tell you the name of their employer. This can be used to trace their occupational records, which may lead you to more discoveries. Depending on the nature of their employment, the records may be found in local archives or still retained by the company. Try searching the local county archive's online catalogue for the name of their employer, because these will not be categorised using the names of individual employees.

Historic newspaper articles are another example of needing to look further. If your forebear is named in a court case or coroner's inquest, see if the original records survive. If they are identified as a member of a group, such as a sports team, band or the local Women's Institute, again search the archives for the name of the group to see what records are held. Think hard about what you know about your ancestor, and try different search terms.

Families frequently moved to places where other relations had moved to

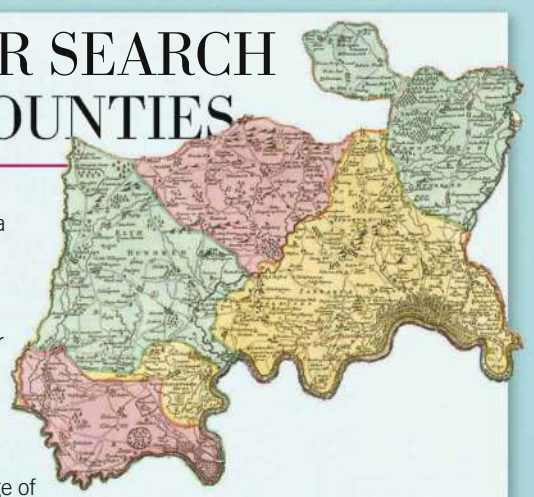
4 Find Others Who Made The Same Journey

Many ancestors were not baptised near the parish where they married or spent the remainder of their lives. People historically were also much less likely to know where they were born. When asked, they would often record the first place that they remember living as a child. Together these issues can cause a problem. Families frequently moved around the country together, which can help.

Imagine you have a forebear in a census return living in Bristol stating that their birthplace is Yeovil. You can use this information to learn if anybody else with the same surname made the same journey by searching census returns online (check surname, place of residence and birthplace). You may also wish to enter a birthdate ±10 years. In cases involving smaller parishes it is not even necessary to enter the surname because so few results will be returned. Look into those who made the same journey to see what you can uncover about their lives. In such cases this may reveal siblings who also remember their birthplace incorrectly.

You may wish to broaden the filter for their birthplace in case this is recorded differently by a family member. You should also bear in mind of course that any married sisters of your ancestor will go by a different surname. Where a woman has made the same journey as your relation, trace her marriage record to discover if her maiden name matches that of your forebear.

5 Expand Your Search To Other Counties



When searching online, we can filter results by parish, county or neighbouring county. This is a great way of reducing the number of irrelevant results we get. At times, however, this will also filter out a record that relates to an ancestor. Even if you have no evidence that your forebear ever left the parish that they married in, you may be surprised to find their baptism elsewhere. This could be at the other end of the country, or even a different country altogether. Also, always check the original image of a parish register because this may give you the person's residence, such as "Baptised John, the son of Robert Gately of Kettering" or noting in a marriage register that the bride or groom was from another parish. In the 1804 marriage register of Kingston, Cambridgeshire, my ancestor William Dodson is described as "of Childerly but belonging to Rampton".

GETTY IMAGES

6 RESEARCH EVERYBODY NAMED IN A SOURCE LINKED TO YOUR ANCESTOR

We often read reminders to check the genealogical records for our brick-wall ancestors' known relatives, such as their spouse and children, to see if they yield any clues. Don't forget, however, to also research others who knew your forebear, whether they are suspected to be a relation or not. This could include colleagues, friends, landlords and neighbours. For example, your relation may be named in their will giving a key piece of information, such as their place of birth, the name of their father, or the fact that they used to be known by a different name. You can identify neighbours in census returns and electoral registers, friends in correspondence such as letters and postcards, colleagues in occupational records, and unknown acquaintances listed as informants to their death among others. You never know who may hold the key to unlocking your ancestor's secrets.

Landlords may hold information about your family in estate records

The Ealing Gazette AND WEST MIDDLESEX OBSERVER. SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 1919

7 VARY YOUR TERMS WHEN SEARCHING NEWSPAPERS

Try searching newspaper databases for related search terms other than your ancestor's name. Historically newspaper articles often don't feature people under their full name, or where they do, the text may have been incorrectly transcribed by optical character recognition (OCR). Try searching using their title, such as 'Rev' or 'Mrs' with their surname, or a rank such as 'Cpl', 'Pte' or 'Sgt' – see for example the awards "to local n.c.o.'s and men for military service in France" listed on this newspaper page from 1919. You may also find a person by searching for their street, narrowing results down by county and the date that they were residing there. Searching by surname and parish may also bring up results for your ancestor and other relations.

As well as the births, marriages and deaths columns, relationships are frequently revealed in other articles, such as summaries of court cases. Obituaries and local news stories often give details about a person's parents and even grandparents where there is an interesting story to tell. Try searching for cousins and other relatives of your elusive forebear to see if that provides extra leads.

CHLOE O'SHEA is a genealogist, historian and writer (**thepastrevealed.co.uk**). Her latest book is *Tracing Your Staffordshire Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2025)

Prisoners at an internment camp in Vittel, north-east France, September 1944

THE INHERITANCE OF TRAUMA

In the lead-up to World Mental Health Day on 10 October, **Claire Vaughan** learns how traumatic events exact a heavy toll on subsequent generations

Do you ever feel that something in your heritage might be holding you back, or wonder if an event in your family's past might explain a psychological block that you're keen to overcome? From the very first episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?* in 2004, featuring TV presenter Bill Oddie, we've witnessed celebrities who've grappled with mental health issues uncover ancestry that, according to a popular theory, might go some way to explaining why they are the way they are.

"Intergenerational trauma, also called transgenerational trauma, is the transmission of psychological wounds from one generation to the next. It's not just about traumatic events – poverty, war, abuse, addiction or bereavement – but how these experiences were processed, hidden or left unresolved," says Helen Parker-Drabble, who combines her expertise as a genealogist and counsellor to explore how the past echoes through generations in her series of books *Who Do I Think You Were?*.

It's about how these experiences were processed, hidden or left unresolved

"Trauma passes through families via learnt behaviours, silence, family secrets, and the stories we tell or suppress. Its effects often manifest as unexplained anxiety, emotional distance or attachment difficulties," she adds.

Bill Oddie has been diagnosed with clinical depression, thought to be linked to the absence of his mother, Lillian, when he was growing up. "This isn't curiosity, this journey, it's self-help," he said at the start of his episode. He discovered that Lillian had manic depression, triggered by the tragic loss of two babies, and spent time in a psychiatric hospital – on one occasion, Bill saw her being forcibly returned there. This knowledge allowed him to begin coming to terms with his mother's absence. "She was immensely unlucky ▶

GETTY IMAGES

in things that happened to her," he concluded, adding that he wished he could have done more to help her.

Heritage Of The Holocaust

The concept of intergenerational trauma was pioneered in the 1960s by psychiatrist Dr Vivian Rakoff of the University of Toronto. In 1966, he began to investigate the high incidence of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) observed in the children of Holocaust survivors visiting Canadian clinics. It was thought that they were dealing with trauma that they'd never experienced – that of their parents. It was a radical idea: that along with hair and eye colour, you could inherit trauma.

Hundreds of similar studies have been carried out since, noting intergenerational trauma among the descendants of African-American enslaved peoples, war and genocide survivors, refugees and many other groups who have suffered collective trauma. While it's hard to make generalisations from the results, it's been theorised that resilience can also be passed down to offspring. This is thought to be governed by the sufferer's reaction to the original trauma.

WDYTYA? has tackled several stories featuring mass-traumatic events from slavery to the Holocaust, and the celebrities involved have generally had very powerful reactions to the revelations about their family's past.

"I have lived most of my life in a high-anxiety state and so I want to know where that came from," said actor, comedian and mental health campaigner Ruby Wax at the outset of her episode of *WDYTYA?* from 2017.

She was extremely moved to discover what her parents endured during the Holocaust: her father had kept the truth about his incarceration by the Nazis from her, and family members died in concentration camps. She started to understand her mother's mental health struggles. Ruby also uncovered two great grandmothers and a great aunt who spent time in psychiatric hospitals.

Growing evidence shows trauma can leave chemical marks on genes

Following on from the studies around intergenerational trauma, researchers began to investigate whether biological changes might be part of the mechanism, a theory called 'epigenetics'.

Simply put, this idea suggests that trauma and resulting behaviour and environment can alter the way that genes are expressed (although not the genes themselves). Helen says, "Epigenetics offers compelling insights into how trauma and resilience might pass biologically across generations – not just through learnt behaviours. Growing evidence shows trauma can leave chemical marks on genes, affecting their expression in descendants. Research into Holocaust survivors has found stress-related epigenetic changes in subsequent generations."

But trauma transmission is not down to biology alone.

"Family narratives, socio-economic factors, and culture are equally powerful," she says. "Most hopefully, supportive experiences can create positive epigenetic changes, allowing families to 'rewrite' inherited scripts."

When Family History Heals

So how can family history help to heal intergenerational trauma? On a very simple level, it can help heal hurts by witnessing or reframing past traumas, whether big or small.

Victoria Boyd, a writer from New Zealand whose parents emigrated from England in the 1970s, always had a sense of "disconnect, which came from having no knowledge of my history. I knew I must be part of a larger story, but didn't know what that story was." Her mother, Janet, and grandfather had both grown up knowing no extended family due to a rift between the wife of her great grandfather, William James Steer, and his siblings.

Researching online, Victoria came across a message from Graham Steer wanting to connect with descendants

Leah's Story

Celia Heritage reveals how genealogy and therapy helped one of her clients

Celia's client Leah as a young girl

Leah was an intelligent, creative and empathetic young girl who benefited from a financially secure childhood and excelled in arts subjects, but struggled with her mental health as she got older. She had a successful career, but sought therapy when her marriage broke down and she realised that she was neurodiverse.

In our sessions Leah examined her relationship with her father, which left her feeling angry, unloved and unvalued. A statistician with a quick temper, Gerry always said her skills in the arts wouldn't get her a job.

Looking at her paternal family history, Leah started to understand his mindset. Gerry's father, Fred (born 1887), had been serious and taciturn, but financially astute. Gerry's mother died when he was 15, his brother a few years later and his father when he was 24. He had little support as an adolescent, and struggled to connect with people. Evidence suggests that he might have been neurodiverse as well.

Fred lost his own father Charles (1850–1901), Leah's great grandfather, and four siblings while still a teenager. Financially minded, he too was likely neurodivergent. Charles was descended from entrepreneurs. His father, William, died when Charles was seven, his mother taking over the business. Two of his brothers struggled with their mental health, one took his own life, and another went to prison before dying from an alcohol-related disease.

Several themes recurred across the generations: a focus on money, heightened by financial insecurity; early bereavements leading to isolation, insecurity and potentially mental health issues; and neurodiversity.

Leah now realised that her father wanted her to be independent and financially secure – his way of caring for her. Everything made more sense, and she could let go of her anger.

• You can see Celia discuss Leah's case in detail on YouTube: **tinyurl.com/yt-celia-leah**

CELIA HERITAGE

Ruby Wax had a new appreciation of the benefits of researching your tree after her episode of *WDYTYA?*

of William. His grandfather George was William's brother. Victoria visited England where she met Graham and her extended relations for the first time. She discovered William had 11 siblings, and had been much missed. She's still in close contact with her English family. "Through Graham, and his efforts to connect us with other Steer family, we have changed the story for our generation," she explains.

"By breaking silences and surfacing hidden stories," adds Helen, "we name wounds passed down through generations. Understanding our ancestors' struggles and resilience helps separate inherited pain from personal identity, creating new meaning and sometimes release."

TOP TIP!

If you're struggling with your mental health, support is widely available from such charities as Mind (**mind.org.uk**) and Samaritans (**samaritans.org**).

Breaking The Silence

To tackle such issues, Helen encourages those with adequate emotional support to research family stories with an open mind, noting both wounds and strengths; apply psychological frameworks to interpret family patterns; share these stories in safe, supportive contexts to develop self-compassion; and recognise that healing is also intergenerational – "breaking silence, reframing pain, and consciously transmitting hope and resilience".

Celia Heritage, a professional genealogist who has also trained as a therapist, takes a slightly different approach. She runs a programme called Reframing Roots, which helps people re-evaluate events and behaviours in their family past that may be affecting them in a negative way (traumas), as well as looking at the positive inheritances they have received too.

"As I began working with my therapy clients, I soon noticed that with a significant number, our work came round to me asking them about their family history. Doing this in addition to sharing psychological insights gave these clients a new understanding of their own negative feelings and their origin."

She continues, "Even this simple understanding shifted blocks, as they saw their parents' behaviour in context. I realised that, of course, this had a knock-on effect – each generation in turn had been affected by the life experiences and behaviours of the previous generations, producing a cascading effect through descending generations.

"As I dug deeper into extending the concept over an increased number of generations, I noted key themes and events that often caused inherited emotional mindsets, such as premature bereavement, illegitimacy and poverty – or simply the threat of poverty."

There's still much to be discovered about intergenerational trauma and epigenetics, but one thing is certain: researching your family history is a great way to feel grounded and get to know yourself just a little bit better. As Ruby Wax explained in her episode of *WDYTYA?*, "You know, I could have saved myself a lot of time and money. Rather than doing therapy, I should have been doing genealogy. Now knowing my ancestors, I understand a lot more about myself."

Resources

More on mental health and trauma

BOOKS

Emotional Inheritance
Dr Galit Atlas
Short Books, 2022
These stories from the casebook of a US psychoanalyst illustrate how intergenerational trauma can have an impact on descendants' lives.

Genealogy, Psychology and Therapy – Uncovering Trauma, 2nd Edn
Paula Nicolson
Routledge, 2022
This more academic approach includes some useful insights about the benefits of researching family history to mental health.

WEBSITES

HELEN PARKER-DRABBLE
w **https://helenparkerdrabble.com**
Visit Helen's site for more information about how ancestral research can affect our understanding of ourselves and our wellbeing.

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION
w **mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/world-mental-health-day**
The charity's website has information about World Mental Health Day on 10 October, plus advice for building and protecting good mental health.

MINDPEBBLE
w **mindpebble.co.uk/reframing-roots/**
Celia Heritage explains her approach to family history and the Reframing Roots programme on her website.

THE ART OF RESTITUTION

An upcoming Radio 4 series and podcast reveals how Antony Easton *(right)* uncovered the hidden truth of his father's origins and the Nazis' theft of the family's paintings during the Second World War, says **Claire Vaughan**

The elegant streets of Charlottenburg, a district in the German capital Berlin, include several grand properties once owned by one of the city's wealthiest families. Among them is an enormous four-storey building, with sleek marble floors and a cream-white façade. *The House at Number 48*, a new series available on Radio 4 and BBC Sounds, retraces the journey of London film-maker Antony Easton as he discovered his links with this building via the contents of a suitcase that belonged to his late father, Peter Roderick Easton.

Antony says that he always felt there was something different about his dad while he was growing up. "He had a slight accent. My friends would ask him, 'Where are you from?', and he'd bridle at that." Peter always had a brown leather suitcase full of documents with him, too. "There was a cloud around my dad. There was a darkness in his world."

Peter had a successful career in travel PR, and ran for Parliament as a Liberal candidate. However, Antony says, "I eventually discovered he was born with one name and died with another.

"When I was about 10, a big wooden trunk showed up in our house. It contained crockery and a few other things wrapped up in German newspapers with pictures of goose-stepping Nazis in them. I had a sort of slow dawning of realisation that he was actually from somewhere else." Antony knew that there was a big secret of some kind. "Relatives didn't talk about it, but there were quiet conversations in German."

I discovered he was born with one name and died with another

As the years passed, Antony grew more curious about his father's origins. "In 1997, when he was 71, I went to Berlin with him, to the house he grew up in and to the site of the country house the family had owned 20 miles outside the city."

In 2009, Peter died suddenly. Now charged with sorting out his affairs, Antony could finally open the precious suitcase. It contained a large quantity of documents: letters, medals, photographs, newspaper clippings, German bank notes, handwritten journals and a faded, two-foot-long family tree. "They were like clues, taking us along a path," Antony recalls.

A birth certificate revealed his father's original name: Peter Hans Rudolf Eisner. Much of the paperwork was in German, which Antony couldn't understand. "There was some legal stuff that my dad was involved in – issues that were open-ended from the Second World War, and I had to then get involved."

Painting Revelation

Around this time, Marianne Forster, who'd been Antony's nanny, sent her condolences. She spoke German, and offered to help. A few days after she'd looked through his dad's paperwork she emailed a photograph she found of a painting, Adolph

STOLEN BY THE NAZIS

Researchers worldwide are trying to trace the families who owned looted artwork

The Nazi policy of seizing works of art and other items of cultural heritage from their enemies during the Second World War, using theft and coercion, is widely known. However, the party's rapacious looters were active much earlier than that: between 1933 and 1945 approximately 650,000 artworks were forcibly acquired by the Nazis throughout Europe.

After the war, huge amounts of stolen art were found stored in buildings, from salt mines to castles. Some 60,000 pieces were returned to France, but 2,000 of these were held by the government as having no clear rightful owner.

In recent years there has been a move to reunite these looted pieces with the descendants of their original owners through organisations such as the Lost Art Database (**lostart.de/en/start**) and the Commission for Looted Art in Europe (CLAE; **lootedartcommission.com**). New guidelines have been agreed by 21 countries, including France and the USA. These have expanded the scope of restitution to include any works sold during the Nazi era by persecuted people, such as Antony's great grandmother.

US soldiers recover stolen art in Germany

Great efforts are now being made to track down the provenance of those pieces on display in museums and galleries around the world, held by governments where, in the past, no rightful owner could be found.

GETTY IMAGES | MARCUS TOMLINSON

Eisenwalzwerk was commissioned by Antony's forebear

Menzel's *Eisenwalzwerk* (1872–1875). This powerful image depicts the inside of a steelworks with a block of molten steel glowing brightly.

"That painting was a complete door-opener to everything else. The whole story of my father's family, my family, is in that painting: the achievement and the loss," says Antony.

Bit by bit, with help from German genealogist Andrea Enderlein-Schulz among others, he began to piece together his dad's story. The family tree in the suitcase helped him search the internet for clues about his Eisner ancestors, including his grandfather Rudolf (1888–1946) and Heinrich (1850–1918), his great grandfather – who'd commissioned the painting.

Andrea tracked down obituaries for Heinrich. He'd headed one of the biggest businesses in Germany, with interests across Europe. The Eisners were billionaires several times over, and philanthropists who enjoyed opera, theatre and art.

Heinrich's tomb in Berlin is a large, Palladian-style affair. Visiting it for the series, Antony muses, "Heinrich is ground zero. It really begs the question: what happened?"

Just before the Second World War broke out, Rudolf took his young family to London. They'd had a lucky escape, but the German government prevented them from bringing over 98 per cent of their wealth with them.

This case helped Antony discover an amazing story

Antony approached the museum that now owned *Eisenwalzwerk*. "They told me the address of the dealer. Later, a researcher learnt that the house at that address had been owned by my great grandmother." It was the house at number 48.

Antony had a good idea how the painting had found its way to the museum – he just had to prove it…

"Recently I found this brilliant researcher, Yana Slavova, who's fluent in German and English." Yana managed to access German archives that Antony was unable to, spotting one very interesting record. "She took pictures of it on her phone. That document was explosive."

Antony believes it reveals exactly what happened to his great grandmother's painting.

"Things snowballed after that. The Commission for Looted Art in Europe (see the box) found another painting that had belonged to my great uncle in a museum in Israel. Bought by Hitler, it ended up in a salt mine and was recovered. There are lots and lots of others too."

Much of Antony's time since then has been taken up with the red tape relating to his family's stolen art, with more about the Eisners' fascinating story coming to light in the process.

And when *Eisenwalzwerk*, the painting that started it all, is finally on his wall? "I will have a tremendous sense of satisfaction. I'll remember all those family members who I didn't know.

"There have been two types of loss here, and two types of restitution. One is to do with money and property and possessions. And the other with people and families and relationships."

In bearing witness to what happened to the Eisners he has honoured both, but you'll have to listen to the new series, from documentary-maker Charlie Northcott and producer Jim Frank, to discover the full story.

Every episode of *The House at Number 48* will be available on BBC Sounds within the feed 'The History Podcast' from 13 October, with episodes also broadcast weekly on Radio 4

GETTY IMAGES | BBC

'My Relations Are Part Of A Rich Tapestry Of Welsh Heritage'

A Calvinist minister, hill farmers, a musical icon and a self-taught solicitor – together they tell a story of what it is to be Welsh. Antony David Davies shared his remarkable relatives with **Claire Vaughan**

Researching Welsh roots can be a challenge, since you usually have to contend with the overlapping identities of ancestors amid the swirl of patronymic names, endless recycling of first names, and a limited pool of surnames. So pinpointing one of the earliest of his forebears to work the land at the family farm at Caeadda in rural Montgomeryshire, Mid-Wales, was a big moment for Antony David Davies. "This was more than just a genealogical find – it was a rare glimpse into a world often lost to time, where records are scarce and oral memory fades. It was a quiet eureka moment: realising that I hadn't just found a person, but had crossed a historical threshold into the world that they actually inhabited."

Elinor has championed Welsh music and language throughout her career

The portrait of David Davies, Antony's wealthy great uncle, that was 'discovered in a shed'

Originally from Mid-Wales, but now living in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, Antony is fascinated by his Welsh heritage. He got the research bug when he was just 12, and now combines it with his work as a writer on overlooked Welsh history and cultural heritage. His projects include several books, such as *Old Llyfnant Valley Farming Families* (self-published, 2016), and a campaign to preserve a medieval walkway under threat.

Family is everything, and the relatives Antony has discovered during his research make him proud to have them in his tree.

"I first began researching my family in around 1993. I'd been very poorly and was confined to bed, and someone gave me a book about tracing your family tree as a gift. I read it cover to cover, which sparked a lifelong passion."

Antony had very little to go on when he started. "I only really knew about my grandmother – *nain* in Welsh – and her children and grandchildren. It wasn't until I began researching that I realised just how rich and varied our family history was."

There was little in the way of family papers. "Over successive generations, documents were 'cleared out' as new occupants took over farms or houses, a common and often heartbreaking reality for rural families."

Records of births, marriages and deaths cross-referenced with censuses helped him verify names, locations, occupations and family groupings, and to construct timelines. "The real depth, however, came from filling in the narrative gaps through surviving chapel records, wills, and – where available – local newspaper archives, which often proved rich in detail."

Early on in his quest, Antony discovered that he was related to cultural icon Elinor Bennett OBE (born 1943), with them sharing Thomas Davies (1827–1891) as a great grandfather.

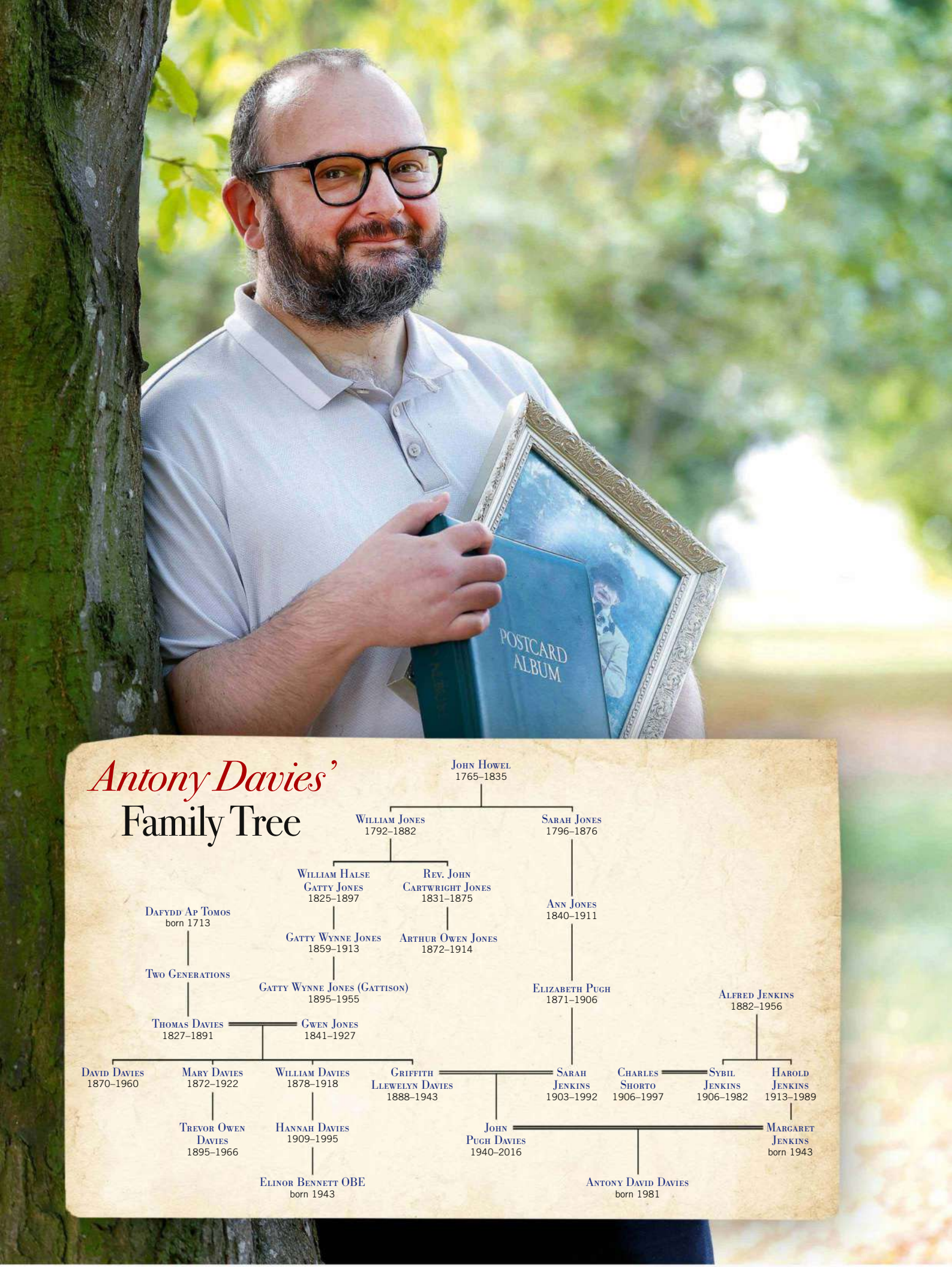
Harpist Hero

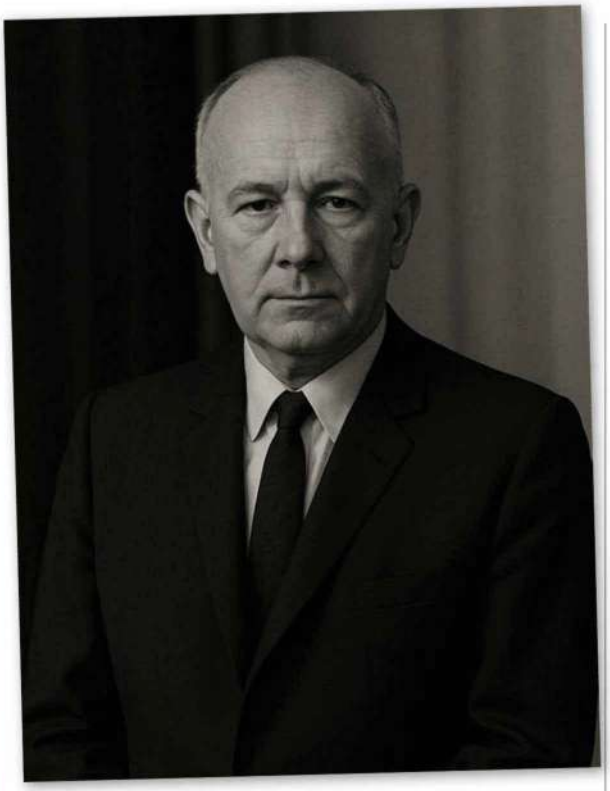
"Elinor grew up in the same Montgomeryshire countryside as many of my forebears, but her path took her onto the international stage as one of Wales' most celebrated harpists. She has championed Welsh music and language throughout her career, inspiring generations.

"When I was 13 or 14, we had a family tree project at school, and when I claimed that I was related to Elinor I got detention for 'making fun of the Welsh'," he reveals. "But what felt like an embarrassment at school now feels like a source of quiet pride."

Following his maternal line back, Antony discovered a ▶

UNP/ADAM FRADGLEY


POSTCARD ALBUM
Antony Davies' Family Tree
John Howel 1765–1835
William Jones 1792–1882
Sarah Jones 1796–1876
William Halse Gatty Jones 1825–1897
Rev. John Cartwright Jones 1831–1875
Ann Jones 1840–1911
Dafydd Ap Tomos born 1713
Gatty Wynne Jones 1859–1913
Arthur Owen Jones 1872–1914
Two Generations
Gatty Wynne Jones (Gattison) 1895–1955
Elizabeth Pugh 1871–1906
Alfred Jenkins 1882–1956
Thomas Davies 1827–1891
Gwen Jones 1841–1927
David Davies 1870–1960
Mary Davies 1872–1922
William Davies 1878–1918
Griffith Llewelyn Davies 1888–1943
Sarah Jenkins 1903–1992
Charles Shorto 1906–1997
Sybil Jenkins 1906–1982
Harold Jenkins 1913–1989
Trevor Owen Davies 1895–1966
Hannah Davies 1909–1995
John Pugh Davies 1940–2016
Margaret Jenkins born 1943
Elinor Bennett OBE born 1943
Antony David Davies born 1981



Antony's great uncle Charles Shorto

▶ great uncle called Charles Shorto (1906–1997). "He was a railway engineer whose career took him from an elite apprenticeship at Crewe in Cheshire to a senior position with British Rail." Antony began by gathering recollections of Charles and his wife Sybil from older relatives who'd known them. Charles had been a pupil at Rugby School in Warwickshire, and Antony tracked him through the school's archives; many records, including annotated registers (1675–1946), are online at **rugbyschoolarchives.co.uk**.

"Ancestry's collection 'UK, Mechanical Engineer Records, 1847–1938' (**ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/3149**) documented key stages of Charles' professional life. I also consulted the Crewe Works records held by Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (**cheshirearchives.org.uk/home.aspx**), which gave further insight into his engineering training and career progression. The British Newspaper Archive (**britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**) helped trace his charitable activities." He'd also been a member of the Stephenson Locomotive Society (**stephensonloco.org.uk**), which provided more details.

"A meticulous and principled man, Charles left a significant charitable trust in his name, worth over £5 million, which continues to support causes in engineering, heritage and community care. His story reminds me that influence often comes not through fame, but through integrity and legacy."

Sadly Charles was the last of his branch of the Shortos, but Antony has kept them alive in his self-published book *Faith, Service, and Respectability: A Historical Biography of the Shorto Family, 1680–1997* (2005), charting their rise from "17th-century Dorset innkeepers to Victorian schoolmasters, clergymen, civil servants and engineers".

Illegitimate Minister

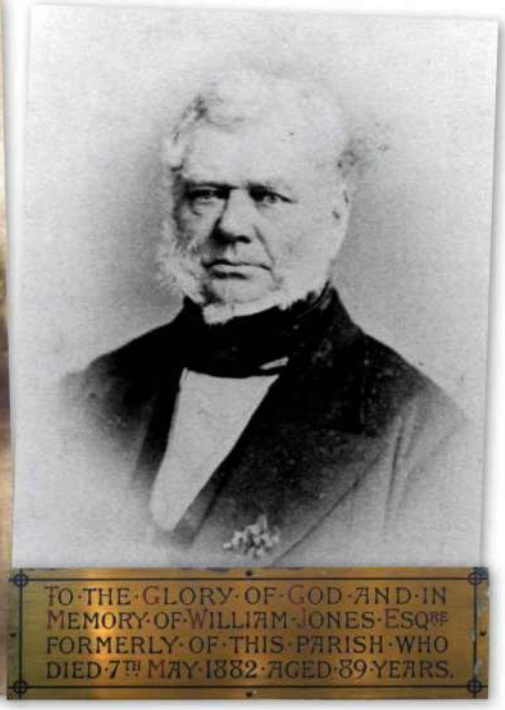
On his paternal side, Antony came across Trevor Owen Davies (1895–1966), whose mother was Antony's great aunt, Mary Davies (1872–1922). "His is a powerful story of resilience, intellect and moral character." Born out of wedlock in a rural Montgomeryshire community, Trevor faced social stigma. But Antony discovered that he'd won scholarships to study theology at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth and then the University of Oxford. Using the archives at Trevor's Oxford college Christ Church (**chch.ox.ac.uk/college/library-archives/archives**), Antony saw how his relation had used his education to progress.

"He became a respected Calvinistic Methodist minister and eventually served as principal of Trevecca Theological College near Brecon, as well as chairing Brecknockshire County Council."

Like Trevor, William Jones (1792–1882), the brother of Antony's 3x great grandmother Sarah Jones (1796–1876), managed to escape the humble life he was born into.

"William moved to London from rural Merionethshire as

Trevor Owen Davies holds his son Gareth Right: solicitor William Jones and the commemorative plaque at his church in London



UNP/ADAM FRADGLEY

a young man, and became a solicitor at a time when few from his background entered the profession. He rose to become a prominent legal and civic figure in the capital, serving as a member of the London Court of Common Council. William was also one of the founders of the Metropolitan Welsh Church, which provided Anglican services in Welsh, and acquired considerable property."

He kept close ties to his family's home region: "I was struck by his ability to navigate two worlds, the metropolis and the mountains." You can still see a plaque on the wall in St Helen's Bishopsgate, City of London, informing visitors that he presented the church with a stained-glass window.

One of William Jones' 53 grandchildren, Arthur Owen Jones (1872–1914), was a celebrated cricketer. "Arthur captained both Nottinghamshire and England, earning a reputation for his elegant batting and tactical innovation. He played during a golden era, and remains one of the few players in Test history to have opened both the batting and the bowling for England."

Worthy of mention for different reasons is Gatty Wynne Jones (1895–1955), a great grandson of William's. "Gatty, better known by his stage name of Gattison Jones, was born and raised in the American Midwest and rose to prominence on the vaudeville circuit alongside his wife, performing across the USA and even on Broadway in New York City. The couple later settled in Los Angeles, California, where Gatty became embroiled in a scandal during the 1930s when his wife filed for divorce, naming Hollywood star Betty Compson as co-respondent. His life reflected a dramatic shift from his Welsh roots to the heart of American popular culture."

In stark contrast to the glamour and gossip of early Hollywood, many of Antony's relations were part of the Davies farming family who worked the land at Caeadda for several hundred years.

"The surname 'Davies' is so common in Wales that distinguishing one line from another in the 18th century can be incredibly difficult," Antony reveals

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

Farming Heritage

Among them was David Davies (1870–1960), Antony's great uncle. "Through him, I've come to see the profound strength and continuity of rural Wales, where history isn't found in books or monuments, but lived quietly in the daily rhythm of farm and field." David was a farmer who lived his entire life in the hills of Llanwrin in Powys. "He was central to the life of his community, stewarding the land, raising a large family, and sustaining the chapel tradition through periods of great change."

Antony's father's family often spoke about David as a wealthy man who had a portrait of himself displayed in his farmhouse.

"In 2013, I had the chance to visit the old farmhouse, which is still in the family. My cousin brought out the very portrait – discovered in a shed on the farm. I recognised it immediately from the family description: 'a man on a horse'. To finally see something I'd only ever heard about was like reaching through time and shaking David's hand."

A major brick wall Antony tackled was trying to trace the earliest relative to arrive at Caeadda. "The surname 'Davies' is so common in Wales that distinguishing one line from another in the 18th century can be incredibly difficult. But by carefully analysing patronymic naming patterns, land-tax records and chapel connections, I was able to trace the family back to David Thomas (born c1713), who likely would have been known in his own time as Dafydd ap Tomos." However, DNA analysis suggests that "the Davies family were rooted in the Machynlleth uplands long before written records, very likely farming those hills since the Bronze Age".

The individuals Antony has uncovered all lived very different lives, but he recognises something that they all share. "The common thread is their deep sense of purpose and service, whether to community, culture, faith or country. That commitment to duty, often without fanfare, is something I admire deeply."

Resources

These resources helped Antony uncover his Welsh roots

ARCHIVE

CHRIST CHURCH ARCHIVES

a St Algate's, Oxford OX1 1DP
t 01865 276171
e *archives@chch.ox.ac.uk*
w **chch.ox.ac.uk/college/library-archives/archives**

University archives often hold detailed student records that can shed light on our academic relations. Trevor Owen Davies attended Christ Church, and its holdings were very helpful.

BOOKS

Chapel Minute Books

Alongside chapel registers of births, marriages and deaths, these records of officials' meetings can shine a light on local politics, community discipline and religious life, although many minute books are missing. They are often held in county record offices, or by denominations such as the Presbyterian Church of Wales (**ebcpcw.cymru/en/**).

WEBSITE

WELSH NEWSPAPERS ONLINE

w **newspapers.library.wales**

Via this free resource from the National Library of Wales you can search and view 15 million articles back to 1804.

FOCUS ON

Asylum Records

Michelle Higgs explains how to find out if your Victorian or Edwardian forebear was a patient at a mental hospital

This World Mental Health Day (10 October), take a moment to reflect on the experiences of our ancestors who were mentally ill. How were they looked after, and where?

Before the mid-18th century, the UK had just one public lunatic asylum: London's Bethlem Hospital (Bedlam). The wealthy paid for treatment for their loved ones in private 'madhouses', but most other 'lunatics' were cared for by their families or the parish, and were unfortunately frequently locked up if they were deemed dangerous.

From 1808, local authorities in England and Wales were encouraged to build county asylums for pauper lunatics.

In 1850, there were 24 county asylums with an average of 300 patients each

These asylums were made compulsory after the 1845 Lunatic Asylum and Pauper Lunatics Act. In 1850, there were 24 county asylums with an average of 300 patients each. Forty years later, England and Wales had 66 asylums with capacity for more than 800 patients in each. However, most 'harmless' lunatics were accommodated in workhouses because it was cheaper for the authorities.

Scotland had a different system. Before 1855, it had seven large mental hospitals and a network of smaller private ones. After the 1857 Lunacy (Scotland) Act, new asylums were built, run as part of the Poor Law and administered by parishes. The first opened in 1863, and by 1910 a further 18 were in operation.

In addition, there were large-scale asylums run by charities for patients labelled as 'idiots' and 'imbeciles'; today, they would be described as having learning disabilities. By the 1860s, there were five such institutions in England and Wales, three in Scotland and one in Ireland. Three state-funded asylums for idiots and imbeciles were also founded in the 1870s through London's Metropolitan

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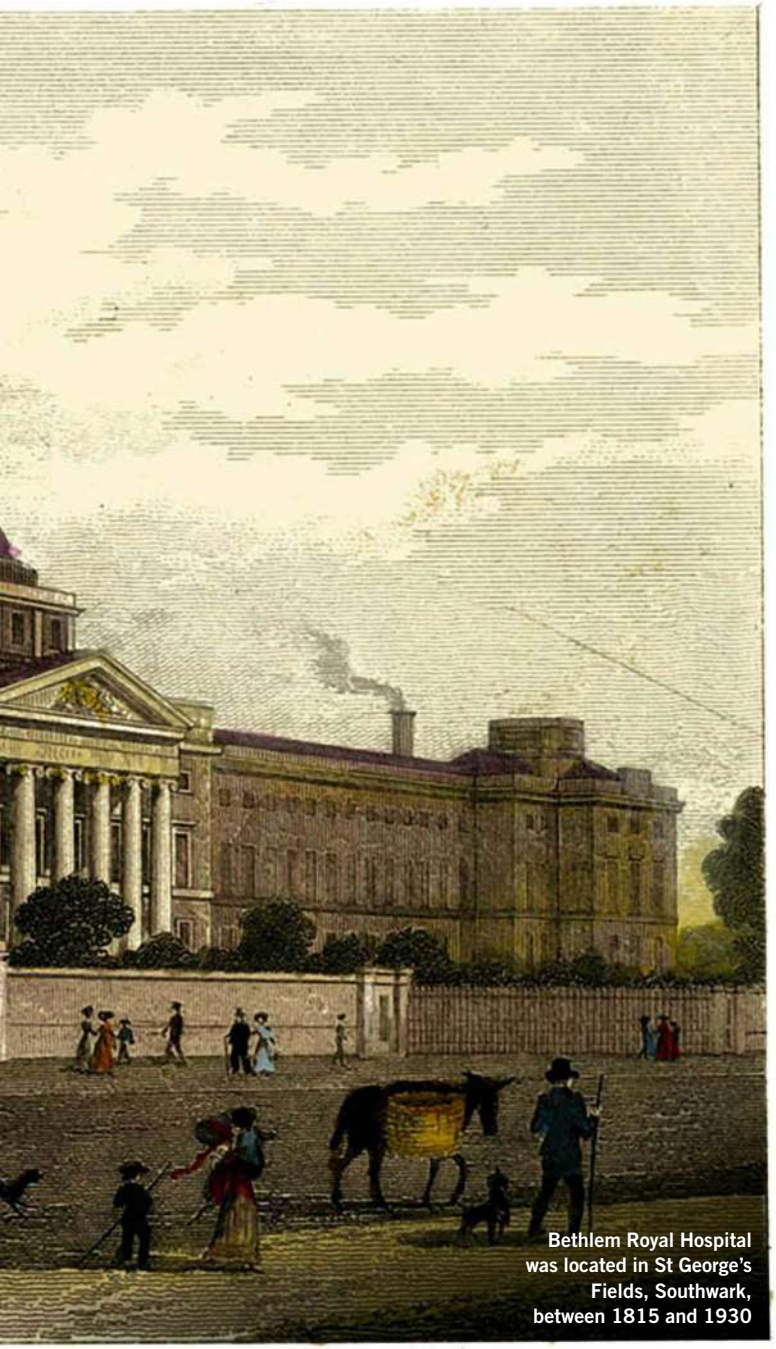


Bethlem Royal Hospital was located in St George's Fields, Southwark, between 1815 and 1930

Asylums Board. However, there were never sufficient places available so the learning disabled were usually accommodated in Poor Law institutions; the more troublesome were sent to county lunatic asylums.

The first county lunatic asylums were not opened simply to incarcerate the mentally afflicted – they were designed to cure them where possible. Many patients found that time away from the stresses of daily life, along with fresh air, nutritious food and work therapy, significantly improved their mental wellbeing. Unfortunately, the number of asylum patients rose considerably during the 19th century with far fewer cases being discharged. By 1914, there were over 100,000 patients in more than 100 mental institutions across the UK. Asylums sadly became places where chronic, incurable patients were confined with no realistic hope of recovery.

A patient in Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1814

Detailed Records

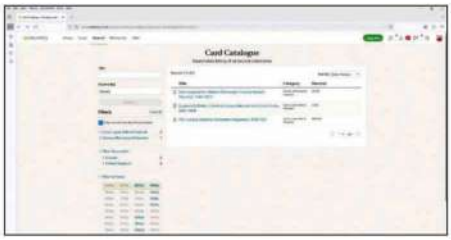
Meticulous record-keeping was legally required by public asylums and licensed private madhouses, and that's why we have such detailed records today. But you're more likely to find your relation in the documents if they were a patient in a public asylum, rather than a private institution.

If your forebear lived in England or Wales, start with the Lunacy Patients Admission Registers for public and private asylums, beginning in 1846. The original records are preserved at The National Archives in Kew (TNA; **nationalarchives.gov.uk**) under reference MH 94, but they are also available to members of Ancestry in the company's collection 'UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers, 1846–1921': **ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/9051/**. Details include the patient's name and sex, the institution, and the dates of admission and discharge, or death. Your forebear may be listed more than once if they had separate periods of mental illness, or were moved between asylums.

The equivalent record ▶

Find Your Forebear In Admission Registers

Michelle explains how to search for your relation in a major collection available through Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**)



1 Locate the collection
Click 'Search' at the top of the homepage then 'Card Catalogue' in the dropdown. Enter 'lunacy' as your keyword, then click 'Search'. Choose 'UK, Lunacy Patients Admission Registers, 1846–1921' in the search results.

2 Search the registers for your relation
Search for your forebear by typing in his or her name. You can narrow down the search results by adding a year of admission and/or the name of their institution, if known.

3 Review the search results
Remember that there may be several relevant results if your relation was treated more than once in different asylums, so make sure that you check every page of the admission registers.

GETTY IMAGES

for Scotland is the General Register of Lunatics in Asylums from 1858; this lists all patients, including those admitted before 1858 who were still being treated. The National Records of Scotland (**nrscotland.gov.uk**) holds the originals (MC7).

DID YOU KNOW?

Most institutions preferred minimal restraints but used waist-belts, muffs or jackets with violent or severe cases. Every instance of restraint was recorded in a register.

For patients admitted after 1 January 1858, there are detailed admission forms (MC2). The website Scottish Indexes (**scottishindexes.com/learninghealth.aspx**) has indexed both record sets. You can search for free and order copies of documents for a fee; the indexes are also available on Findmypast at **search.findmypast.co.uk/search-world-records/scotland-mental-health-institutions-registers-and-admissions**.

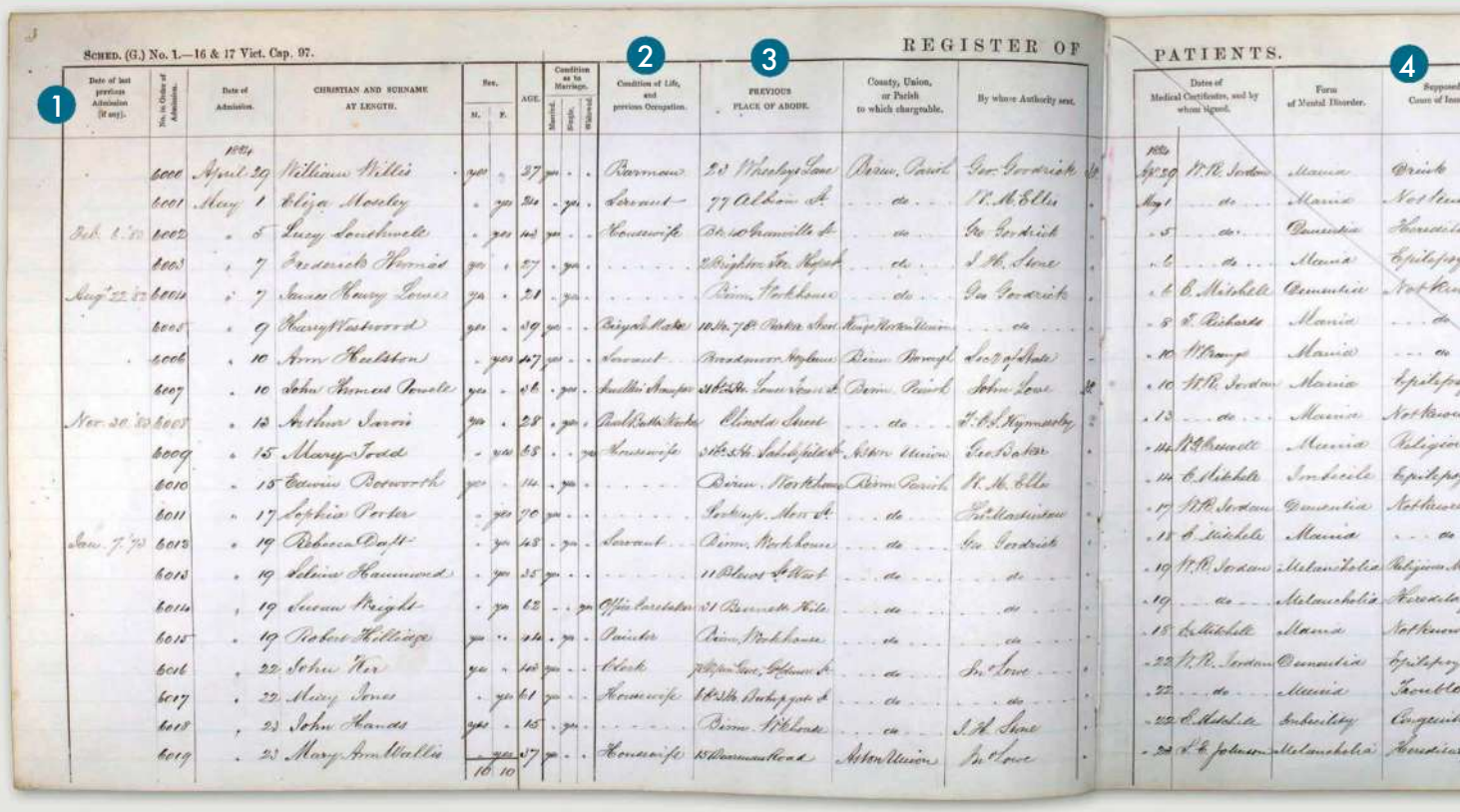
Although it can be upsetting to discover that your forebear was in an asylum, the documents provide illuminating details not just about their health and treatment but also their family backgrounds.

Harry Westwood, a 39-year-old bicycle maker, was admitted to All Saints' Hospital (formerly known as Birmingham City Asylum) on 9 May 1884, after three months of manic episodes (see the annotated document). He had threatened to kill himself and his father. According to the casebook records, Harry's father had had "to change his lodgings from time to time to try to get away from him". Harry was discharged "recovered" on 10 September 1886. Sadly, he was readmitted three months later from the Moor Street lock-up, having been violent towards his sister and father. This time, there was no recovery so Harry became a long-stay patient with chronic mania. In July 1904, he was removed to Rubery Asylum where he died in March 1917.

Locating Documents

Most asylum records are preserved in local archives, and you can find out whether

Admissions Register, 1884



1 Date Of Last Previous Admission (If Any)

This column shows whether the patient had previously been admitted to the same asylum for treatment, indicating a history of mental illness.

2 Condition Of Life, And Previous Occupation

The patient's occupation before entering the asylum is given, proving that mental illness could affect people from every walk of life – and still does, of course.

3 Previous Place Of Abode

The patient's address before their admission could be their home, the workhouse or another asylum – perhaps Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum in Berkshire, which opened in 1863.

4 Supposed Cause Of Insanity

This lists the possible reason given by the spouse, parent or other relative for the illness; often it's "Not known". The adjacent column on the right has more information about the symptoms.

patient records are available by searching TNA's online catalogue Discovery for England and Wales (**discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk**); the Scottish Archive Network catalogue SCAN for Scotland (**catalogue.nrscotland.gov.uk/scancatalogue/welcome.aspx**); and NI Direct for Northern Ireland (**nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/ecatalogue**).

Three main types of record were kept: admission registers; discharge/death registers; and patient casebooks and/or case files. The documents are more detailed from the 1840s onwards. The admission registers include the patient's full name, age and marital status; place of abode and occupation; date of admission and social class (pauper or private); mental and physical condition; the diagnosed mental disorder and supposed cause; plus religion and education.

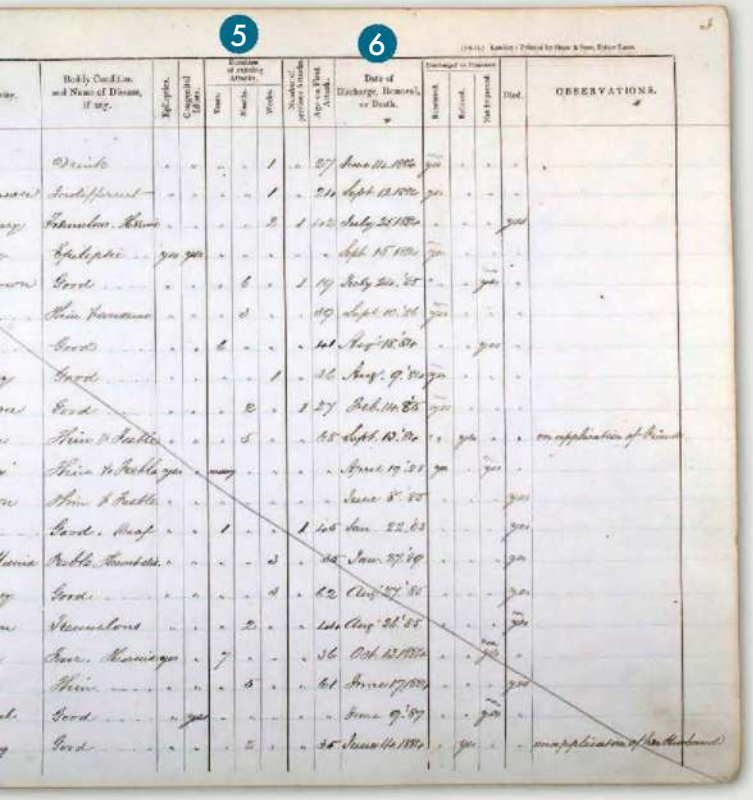
Patients were bathed and examined on arrival, and a diagnosis was recorded in the admission register; this might be melancholia, mania, dementia or amentia (idiocy and imbecility). The registers also state whether a patient was recovered, relieved or not improved when they were discharged or died.

If your ancestor's casebook has survived, there will be regular reports about their health, behaviour and treatment. From the 1870s onwards, they might even contain photos of patients. Registers of pauper lunatics were also kept by local Poor Law authorities.

From the 1870s onwards, casebooks might even contain photos of patients

An increasing number of asylum records have been digitised. Findmypast has the collections 'London,

This register of admissions of pauper lunatics to All Saints' Hospital in May 1884 is held by the Library of Birmingham and available digitally on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**)



5 Duration Of Existing Attacks

This confirms how long the patient had been ill before admission. The adjacent column "Number of Previous Attacks" reveals whether they had suffered insanity before.

6 Date Of Discharge, Removal, Or Death

These two columns record the date the patient left the asylum, and whether they had recovered, were "Relieved" or "Not Improved", or had died.

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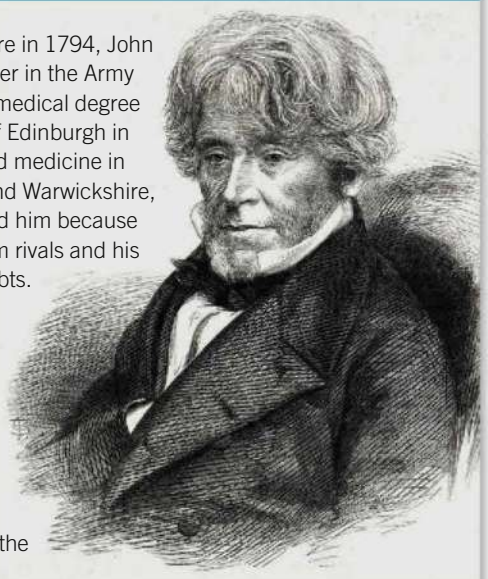
John Conolly 1794–1866

This psychiatrist improved the lives of generations of patients



Born in Lincolnshire in 1794, John Conolly had a career in the Army before finishing a medical degree at the University of Edinburgh in 1821. He practised medicine in Sussex, London and Warwickshire, but success eluded him because of competition from rivals and his own increasing debts.

Conolly's thesis had been on the state of the mind in madness and melancholia, and he decided to return to this area of medicine. In 1839, he became the resident physician at the Middlesex County Pauper Lunatic Asylum at Hanwell; his wife and four children moved with him to the asylum.

Before starting his new job, Conolly visited Lincoln Asylum, run by Robert Gardiner Hill, where a system of 'non-restraint' had been introduced. Conolly followed a similar strategy at Hanwell, abolishing straitjackets, leg irons and handcuffs; instead, there was strict supervision from vigilant staff as well as a rigorous work and exercise regime for the 850 patients.

Conolly became a leading proponent of this humane approach, which was very controversial. However, he won over *The Lancet*, *The Times* and reforming parliamentarians. By 1846, non-restraint had become the Lunacy Commission's ruling orthodoxy.

John resigned as resident physician at Hanwell in 1844 but held a visiting physician post until 1852 when he returned to private practice, opening a small private asylum. In 1858, he became president of the Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane. Conolly died in 1866.

A young woman being admitted to a lunatic asylum is introduced to the staff, c1870

▶ Bethlem Hospital Patient Admission Registers and Casebooks 1683–1932' and 'Guernsey, Hospital and Asylum Records', plus the aforementioned indexes for Scottish institutions. It also has transcripts for 'Prestwich Asylum Admissions 1851–1901', 'South Yorkshire Asylum, Admission Records' (which cover 1872–1910) and 'Wiltshire Asylum Registers, 1789–1921'.

Ancestry's Offering

Ancestry has the collections 'Fife, Scotland, Asylum Registers, 1866–1937', 'Birmingham, England, All Saints Hospital Records, 1845–1931' and 'Surrey, England, Admissions to Brookwood and Holloway Mental Hospitals, 1867–1900', in addition to 'Bodmin, Cornwall, England, Inmates at St. Lawrence's Asylum, 1840–1900' and 'Glamorganshire, Wales, Glamorgan County Asylum Records, 1845–1920' (note that the last two collections are transcripts only).

Some museums and archives now have indexes or records on their websites. For example, NHS Grampian Archives has indexes for the Banff and Aberdeen Lunatic Asylums (**abdn.ac.uk/collections/our-collections/browse/archive-collections/nhs-grampian-archives/guides-and-indexes**). The Worcester Medical Museums site has records for Powick Hospital patients (**medicalmuseum.org.uk/powick-patients/?rq=asylum**). The Norfolk Record Office (**archives.norfolk.gov.uk**) has patient indexes from St Andrew's Hospital, the former Norfolk County Asylum, while the website Staffordshire Name Indexes (**staffsnameindexes.org.uk**), run by Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent Archive Service, has an index of patients admitted to Staffordshire asylums.

Also the Wellcome Library has partnered with other archives to digitise the records of the York Retreat; St Luke's Hospital, London; Crichton Royal Hospital, Dumfries; Gartnavel Royal Hospital, Glasgow; and Camberwell House Asylum. The digitised records of Ticehurst, a private asylum in East Sussex, are also in the library's collection (**wellcomecollection.org/collections**).

Some museums and archives now have indexes or records on their websites

TOP TIP!

Institutions changed their names over time to reduce stigma. An institution referred to as a "hospital" on a death certificate could have been an asylum, so check online.

MICHELLE HIGGS is the author of *Tracing Your Ancestors in Lunatic Asylums* (Pen & Sword, 2019) and many other books

Resources

Take your research further

BOOK

Life in the Victorian Asylum
Mark Stevens
Pen & Sword, 2014
This social history was written by an archivist at the Berkshire Record Office.

MUSEUM

BETHLEM MUSEUM OF THE MIND
a **Bethlem Royal Hospital, Monks Orchard Road, Beckenham, Greater London BR3 3BX**
t 0203 228 4227
w **museumofthemind.org.uk**
The museum preserves art, records and objects, plus has learning resources online. Its archives are open weekdays by appointment.

WEBSITES

COUNTY ASYLUMS
w **countyasylums.co.uk/the-asylum-list/**
Use this excellent site to find out more about specific institutions across the UK, including previous names.

INDEX OF ENGLISH AND WELSH LUNATIC ASYLUMS AND MENTAL HOSPITALS
w **studymore.org.uk/4_13_ta.htm**
Andrew Roberts' website has this comprehensive index.

MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION
w **mentalhealth.org.uk/our-work/public-engagement/world-mental-health-day**
Learn more about World Mental Health Day.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
w **tinyurl.com/tna-guide-mental-health**
TNA's site includes a very useful research guide for tracing patients of asylums.

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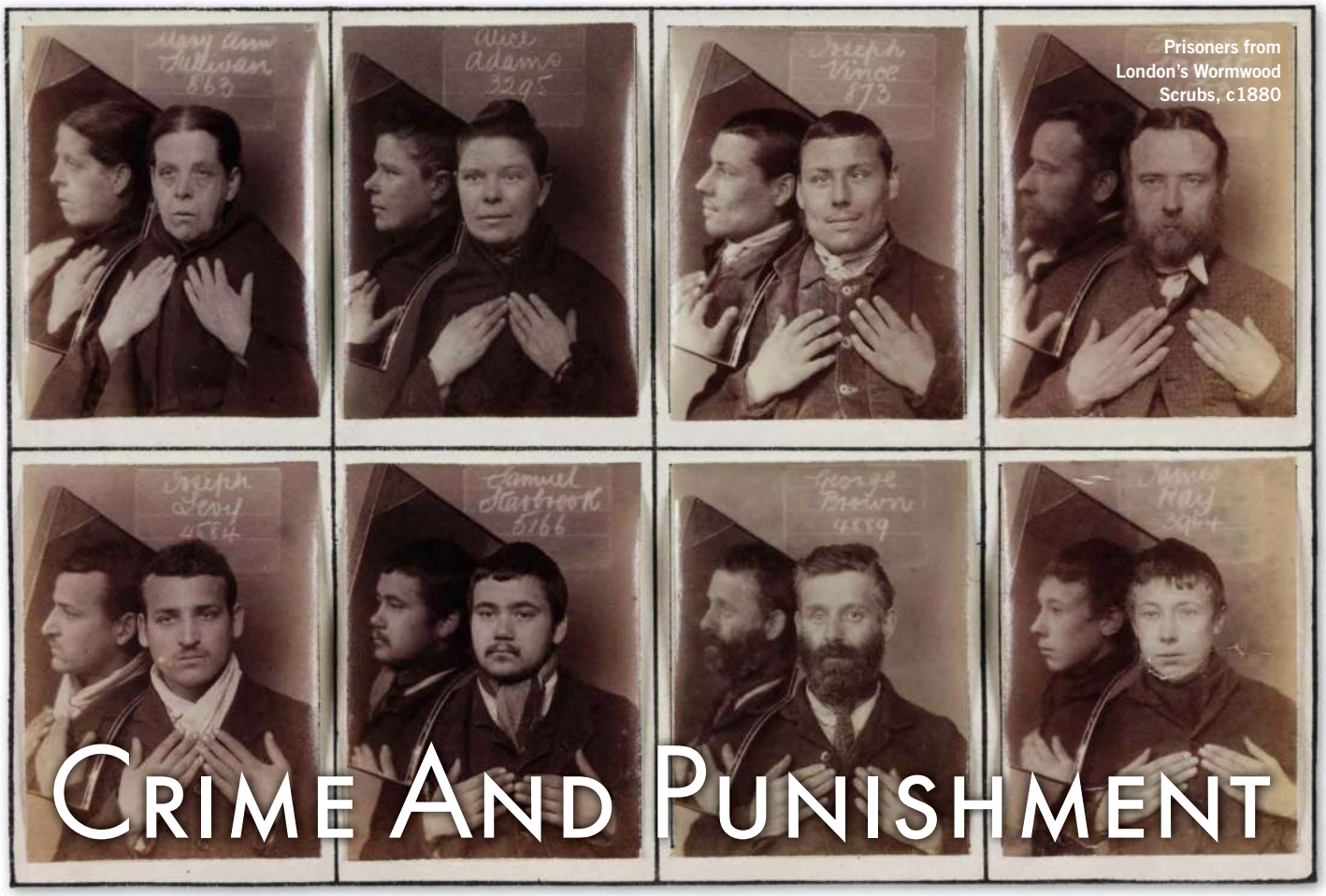

Prisoners from London's Wormwood Scrubs, c1880

Crime And Punishment

A wealth of online records can help you uncover a forebear's misdeeds, says **Jonathan Scott**

Crime has always been popular with family historians. We all love a rogue (up to a point, anyway), and finding out you're related to one can lead to some interesting avenues of research. The more serious crimes are most likely to leave a paper trail, but with legwork you may be able to find evidence of everything from minor infractions to fraud, bigamy, theft and debt.

Our top two websites this month have both received an upgrade since we last covered the topic. In general, county record offices are the place to find records of petty sessions (which dealt with minor matters), quarter sessions (which met four times a year to deal with all kinds of offences), as well as records of county and coroners' courts.

Even the most ostensibly respectable and seemingly well-to-do people can have a brush with the law. While I was researching the career of a former teacher who became a travelling lecturer in the 1880s, I found an account of him being thrown in jail after attacking a newspaper editor who had given his show a poor review.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE OLD BAILEY

w **oldbaileyonline.org**

The ninth iteration of this fascinating resource was launched in 2023. At its heart is the same database – a fully searchable collection of more than 197,752 trials held at London's central criminal court – which you can browse at random, filter by various categories, or search by name or keyword. The proceedings contain 127 million words, from trials held between 1674 and 1913, as well as 475 biographies of executed convicts published between 1676 and 1772. A search for 'phonograph', for example, led to a case from 1910, where one Charles Abbs and Samuel Kingsnorth were accused of breaking into a shop in Clerkenwell, Central London, and stealing a phonograph and 24 records. There's a tutorial for newbies, or you can just dive in.

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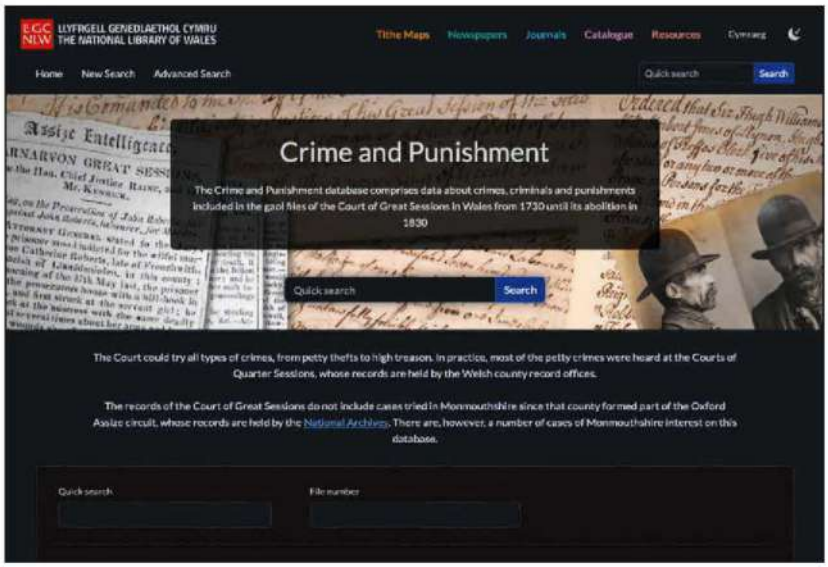
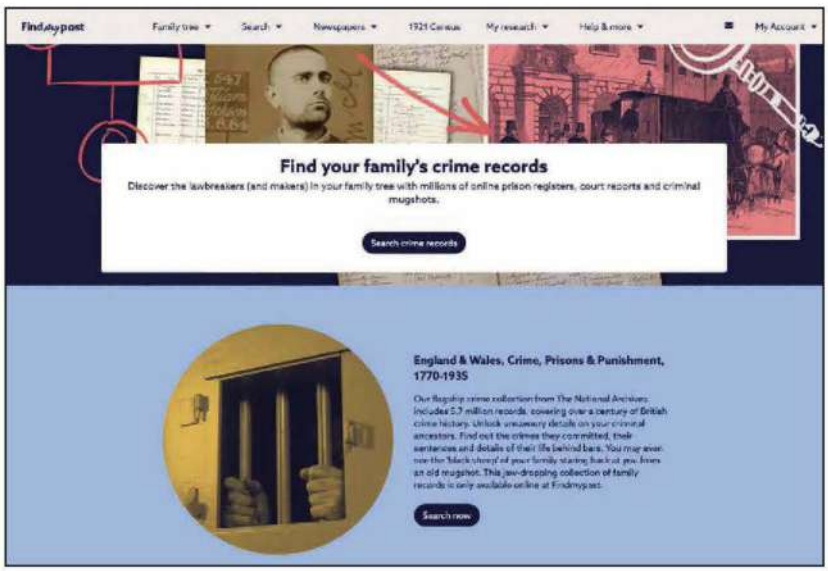
BEST WEBSITES



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

w **crimeandpunishment.library.wales**

This National Library of Wales database has been given a polish and a shiny new address since it was last featured in a 'Best Websites' round-up. The search function allows you to try a quick search, or narrow by accused's name, occupation, county or parish, or the type and location of the crime. The data comes from the files of the Court of Great Sessions in Wales from 1730 until it was abolished in 1830. Keep in mind that the Court of Great Sessions did not include cases tried in Monmouthshire – that county was part of the Oxford Assize circuit, whose records are held by The National Archives at Kew (TNA).



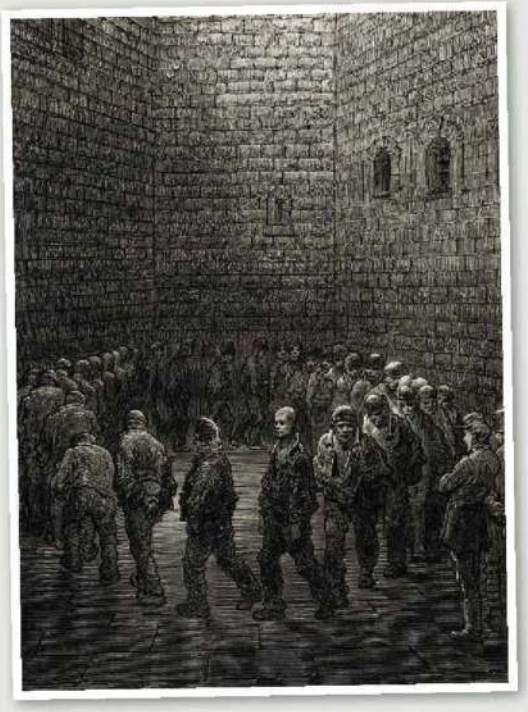
FINDMYPAST

w **findmypast.co.uk/page/crime-prisons-punishment**

Subscription website Findmypast has the largest single collection of British crime records online thanks to its relationship with TNA. Records range from prison and criminal registers to judge's reports and parole licences. The collection spans 1770–1935, although the vast majority of records date from the 19th century. Findmypast also has Irish Prison Registers (1790–1924) and Irish Petty Sessions Court Registers (1828–1912) as well as a range of Australian convict records. The site also has Manchester Prison Registers (1847–1881), Surrey Quarter Sessions (1789–1829) and a Scotland, Court and Criminal Database from **scottishindexes.com**.

EXPERT'S CHOICE

Dr Nell Darby is a crime historian and the author of *Sister Sleuths: Female Detectives in Britain* (Pen & Sword, 2021)



The exercise yard at Newgate Prison, depicted by Gustave Doré in *London: A Pilgrimage* (Grant & Co., 1872)

One of the websites I regularly use – and always find out new information at – is Prison History (**prisonhistory.org**), which was created by the Open University's Centre for the History of Crime, Policing and Justice. The site has a wealth of resources related to 19th-century prisons and local lock-ups.

Lock-ups were where individuals might be held for a few days while waiting to be taken to a magistrate – or they might be incarcerated in the lock-up as a punishment in itself, for offences such as drunkenness. This section of the website has some interesting history about the lock-up, but it also aims to collect information about these buildings, which varied in style and size. You can both search for a specific lock-up, and report 'new' lock-ups to the team for inclusion on the site.

The part of the website devoted to 19th-century prisons similarly enables you to search for an institution in a specific location and learn more about it. The site records what type of prison it was – such as a house of correction, or a lock-up – and you can either just look at the summary or find out more details, such as prisoner statistics for the prison over time. Archival records for the prison are also discussed, enabling the researcher to see what records there are for each prison. It's therefore a gold mine of information for anyone who is interested in their criminal ancestors, and where they might have been incarcerated.

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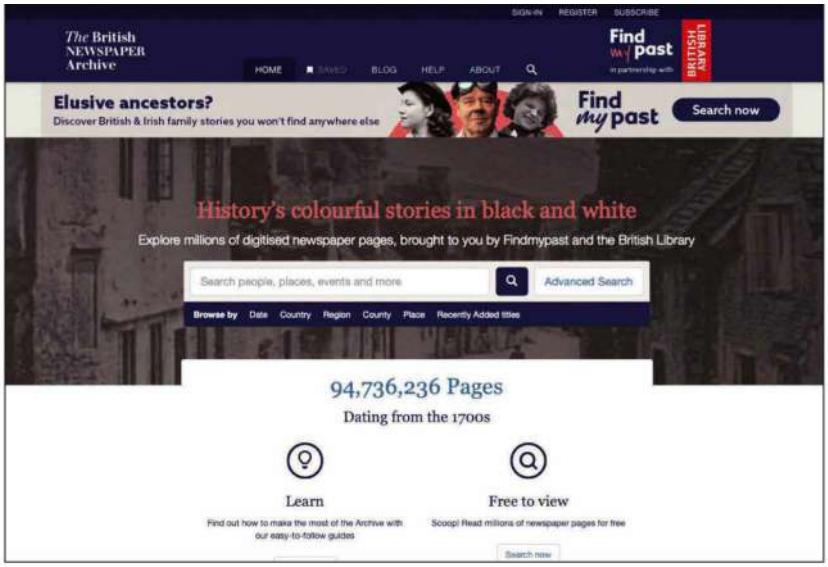


BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE

w **britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk**

You may find references to misdemeanours in local or national newspapers. Even the smallest criminal matters would be grist to the mill of local editors. The BNA's expanding roster of regional titles held by the British Library means it's never been easier to trawl back issues by name or keyword. The same newspapers are also part of the Findmypast Everything subscription. There are several free newspaper resources out there too. You can search 15 million articles at Welsh Newspapers (**newspapers.library.wales**), Australian papers via Trove (**trove.nla.gov.au**), and US titles via Chronicling America (**chroniclingamerica.loc.gov**).

DIGITAL PANOPTICON

w **digitalpanopticon.org**

Linked to this month's main recommendation The Proceedings of the Old Bailey, this project allows you to analyse the lives of 90,000 convicts sentenced to transportation to Australia at the court between 1780 and 1925. You can narrow down your search by occupation, and there are pages on related topics, such as prison hulks and petitions for pardon. In a sense the most fascinating aspect of this website is the tattoo field. Just over 58,000 of the convicts in the database had tattoos, and you can search by type of tattoo, location on the body, as well as the topic of the design such as religion, birthplace or occupation.

GO FURTHER

More websites that can't be missed

ANCESTRY

w **ancestry.co.uk**

As well as a large criminal registers collection, the site has Lancashire quarter session records, calendars of prisoners for South Wales and more.

BLACKSHEEP ANCESTORS

w **blacksheepancestors.com**

This site brings together prison and convict records, court records, and biographies of outlaws from the USA, Canada and the UK.

CONVICT RECORDS

w **convictrecords.com.au**

Search details of 154,587 convicts who were sent to Australia by name, ship's name, or year.

OUR CRIMINAL ANCESTORS

w **ourcriminalancestors.org**

This collaboration between universities in Hull and Leeds has research guides, timelines and case studies featuring more everyday criminality.

SCOTLAND'S PEOPLE

w **tinyurl.com/scots-peop-guide-crime-crims**

This guide describes records unique to Scotland's justice system. Registers for prisons in Perth, Edinburgh and Largs can now be searched free of charge.

SCOTTISH INDEXES

w **www.scottishindexes.com/scotlandscriminaldatabase.aspx**

Search over 800,000 Scottish records compiled from a number of sources, including sheriff's court records and prison registers up to 1935.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

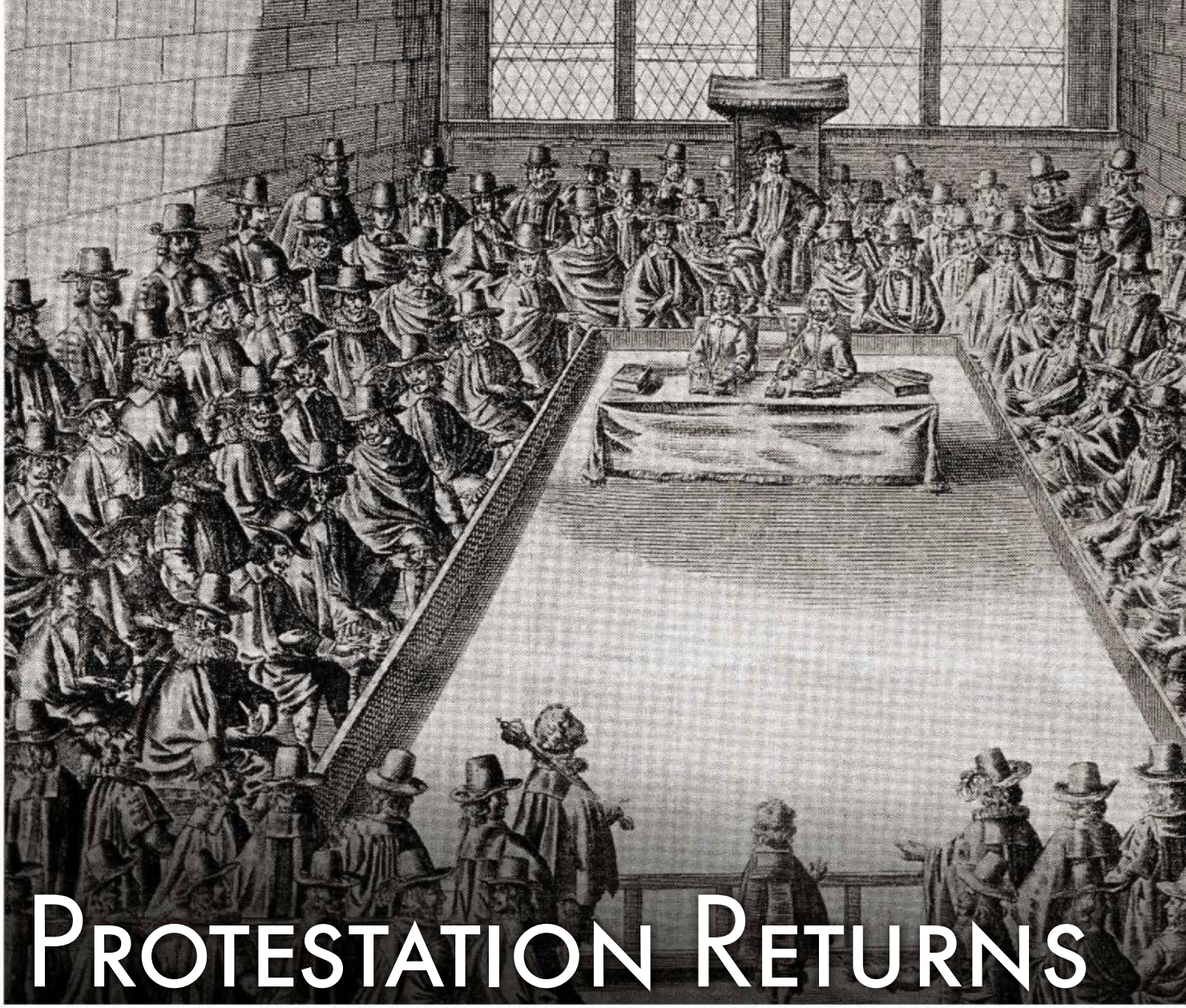
w **tinyurl.com/tna-guide-court-recs-oth-arch**

TNA has a range of useful guides explaining the British justice system, the records that survive and where to find them.

TRANSPORTATION REGISTERS

w **tinyurl.com/slq-convict-queenslanders**

At the website of the State Library of Queensland you can search details of 123,000 felons that are drawn from surviving British Home Office transportation registers.



Protestation Returns

The Protestation Returns are the closest record we have to a census on the eve of the English Civil War (1642–1651). **Paul Blake** explains how to access them on the Parliamentary Archives' website

The origins of the Protestation Returns rest in the political crisis during the early months of 1641. The relationship between Charles I and Parliament had seriously deteriorated and Parliament, along with the general population, became increasingly divided for and against both the Crown and Protestantism. Henry Marten, the MP for Berkshire, proclaimed in Parliament, "Let us unite ourselves for the pure worship of God, the defence of the king, and his subjects in all their legal rights."

A national declaration, a form of oath of allegiance, was drafted. This 'Protestation' required the swearing of a pledge to "maintain, and defend as far as lawfully I may, with my Life, Power and Estate, the true Reformed Protestant religion, expressed in the Doctrine of the Church of England, against all Popery and Popish Innovations, within this Realm, contrary to the same Doctrine, and according to the duty of my Allegiance, to His Majesties Royal Person, Honour and Estate, as also the Power and Privileges of Parliament, the lawful Rights and Liberties of the Subjects, and any person that maketh this Protestation". The House of Commons took the Protestation on 3 May 1641, and the Lords the next day.

> The general assumption was that men only were required to take the Protestation

Although there was considerable procrastination before the Protestation was launched nationwide, some City of London churches and several other parishes around the country took it between June and September. Eventually, as the political situation continued to deteriorate, in January 1641/1642 the speaker of the House of Commons ordered the sheriffs and justices of the peace of each county to take the oath. They were then to ensure that the minister, churchwardens, constables and overseers of each parish should themselves take the Protestation, and in their turn should "call together the Inhabitants of their several Parishes, both Householders and others, being of Eighteen Years of Age and upwards… [and] tender unto them the same Protestation". The names of all those who took the Protestation, as well as

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The House of Commons during Charles I's reign, c1640–1642

those who refused, were to be recorded. Undoubtedly, many put expediency above conviction and took the Protestation anyway, fearful of the consequences. Women were neither explicitly included nor excluded. However, the general assumption was that men only were required to take the Protestation although the occasional woman's name does appear in the returns.

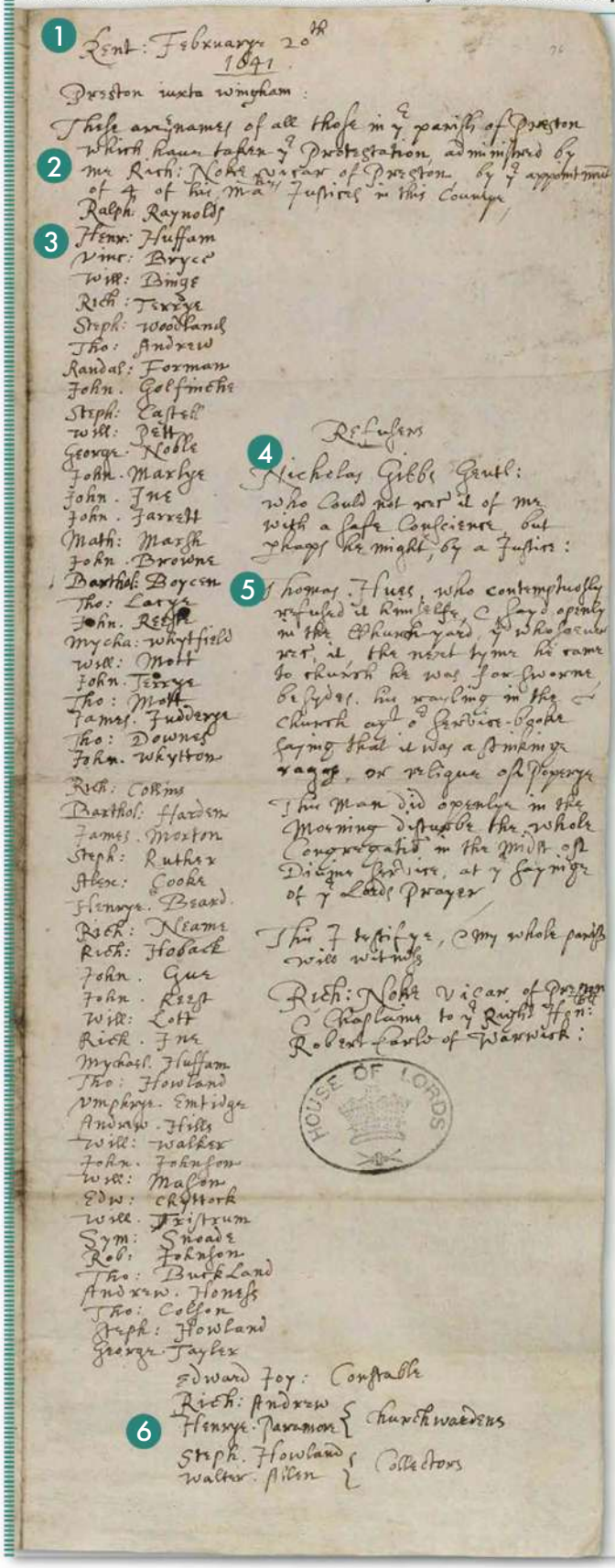
Variation In Records

Most Protestations were taken in late February and March 1641/1642. The content and form of the resulting records can vary enormously from parish to parish. Most are arranged by parish but some by hamlet, tithing and even farm.

For many parishes, the listings of the names of those who took or refused ▶

Protestation Return, 1642

This Protestation Return for Preston juxta Wingham in Kent (ref. HL/PO/JO/10/1/92/49) is freely available on the website of the Parliamentary Archives (**archives.parliament.uk**)



1 Kent: February 20th 1641

Preston iuxta wingham:

These are names of all those in ye parish of Preston which have taken ye Protestation, administred by

2 mr Rich: Noke vicar of Preston by ye appointment of 4 of his Ma'ties Justices in this County

Ralph Raynolds

3 Henr: Huffam
Vinc: Bryce
Will: Binge
Rich: Terrye
Steph: Woodland
Tho: Andrew
Randal: Forman
John. Golsmithe
Steph: Castell
Will: Pett
George Noble
John. Maxbye
John. Jne
John. Jarrett
Math: Marsh
John. Browne
Barthol: Boycen
Tho: Larye
John. Reeve
Mycha: whytfield
Will: Mott
John. Terrye
Tho: Mott
James. Fudderye
Tho: Downes
John. whytton
Rich: Collins
Barthol: ffarden
James. Moxton
Steph: Ruthix
Alex: Cooke
Henrye. Beard
Rich: Neame
Rich: Hoback
John. Gue
John. Reeve
Will: Lott
Rich. Jne
Mychael. Huffam
Tho: Howland
Vmphrye. Embridge
Andrew. Hills
Will: walker
John. Johnson
Will: Mason
Edw: Crytwork
Will. Tristrum
Sym: Sneade
Rob: Johnson
Tho: Burkland
Andrew. Honeys
Tho: Colson
Steph: Howland
George Taylor

Refusers

4 Nicholas Gibbs Gent:
who could not rest it of my with a safe Conscience but thought he might, by a Justice:

5 Thomas Hues, who contemptuously refused it himselfe, & said openly in the Church-yard, & wheresoever not it the next tyme he came to church he was for swoorne beforehand. his rawling in the Church out of a Service-Booke saying that it was a stinkinge ragge, or relique of Poperye

This man did openlye in the Morning disturbe the whole Congregation in the midst of Divine Service, at ye saynge of ye Lords Prayer

This I testifye, & my whole parish will witness

Rich: Noke Vicar of Preston & Chaplaine to ye Ryght Hon: Robert Earle of Warwick:

HOUSE OF LORDS

Edward Foy: Constable
6 Rich: Andrew, Henrye. Parsmon } Churchwardens
Steph. Howland, Walter. Allen } Collectors

1 Date

The date the Protestation was taken is given: 20 February 1641. The date was according to the Julian Calendar then in use, when the year 1642 did not commence until 25 March. The parish is recorded too: Preston juxta Wingham.

2 Mr Richard Noke

The Protestation was taken before Mr Richard Noke, the vicar who had been appointed by the county's justices of the peace. In addition, he notes at the end that he was chaplain to the Right Honourable Robert Earle of Warwick.

3 Names

This section identifies everyone who took the oath. All of the information is written in the same hand. On many Returns, the names would be their actual signatures or marks.

4 Nicholas Gibbs

Two refusers are named, the first being Nicholas Gibbs, whom the vicar thought might be pursued by a justice.

5 Thomas Hues

The second refuser was Thomas Hues, "who contemptuosly refused it", having previously had a major rant in the churchyard and church, calling the service book a "stinkinge ragg or relique of Poperye".

6 Signatories

The Return is signed by the constable, two churchwardens and two collectors.

Charles I raises the Royal Standard in Nottingham on 22 August 1642, declaring war on Parliament

the Protestation are fair copies, written in a uniform hand. For Twickenham in Middlesex, the names are arranged alphabetically, but by forename. Others record their signatures or marks. Not all the Returns are dated but most include the signature of the minister and the parish officers present.

Once the Protestations had been taken, they were returned to Parliament, where they now form part of the Parliamentary Archives (**archives.parliament.uk**). It is estimated that only about one third of the Returns now survive, and solely for England; survival also varies considerably from county to county. Jeremy Gibson and Alan Dell's guide *The Protestation Returns 1641–42 and Other Contemporary Listings* (Federation of Family History Societies, 2004) lists those that are extant. Copies for some places survive among parish records and may now be at the local county record office – these may be the only surviving copies.

Henry Marten MP

Digital Availability

The Parliamentary Archives has digitised all of the Returns it holds; note that its public searchroom is now closed while its collections are moved to The National Archives (**nationalarchives.gov.uk**). These images have been attached to the relevant catalogue record. To access them on the Parliamentary Archives' website, enter the name of a parish or county in the search bar at the top of the homepage; then, on the 'Search Results' page, select 'Protestation Returns' under the 'Category' heading in the 'Sort by:' panel. Depending on how the Return was compiled, you may then be taken to the record of the particular parish, or to a book containing the parish of interest. You will then need to browse to find your relation. Occasionally there may be a transcription.

Many Returns have been transcribed and published by local societies and other organisations; Gibson and Alan Dell's guide is a useful source. Some of these collections have been digitised too; for example a Sussex Record Society volume of West Sussex Returns is freely available at **sussexrecordsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/Digital_editions/SRS-Vol-5.pdf**.

TOP TIP!

If you don't find your family in the parish you expect then you should extend your search to the abutting parishes – remember that these may be in another county.

PAUL BLAKE is a genealogist who specialises in Gibraltar research, as well as the author of several books including *Tracing Your Insolvent Ancestors* (Pen & Sword, 2019)

Resources

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a **Kew, Richmond TW9 4DU**

t 020 8876 3444

w **nationalarchives.gov.uk**

The Parliamentary Archives' collections including the Protestation Returns are currently being transferred to TNA. The relocation is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2025.

ARTICLE

The Protestation Returns of 1641–1642: Part I, The General Organisation

Anne Whiteman

Local Population Studies No. 55, Autumn 1995

This comprehensive article about the origins, administration and content of the Protestation Returns, with an analysis of those who took the oath and those who refused, is freely available at the website of the Local Population Studies Society (**tinyurl.com/lps-whiteman-1**).

BOOK

The Protestation Returns 1641–42 and Other Contemporary Listings

Jeremy Gibson and Alan Dell

Federation of Family History Societies, 2004

This handbook lists the surviving Protestation Returns and published transcripts and indexes, plus collections in aid of Protestants in Ireland and other record series.

WEBSITE

THE ROYAL FAMILY

w **royal.uk/charles-i**

The Royal Family's official site includes an informative history of Charles I.

GETTY IMAGES

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Q&A

Our team of experts offers tips and inspiration Edited By Claire Vaughan

Katherine Cobb is a member of AGRA based in Somerset

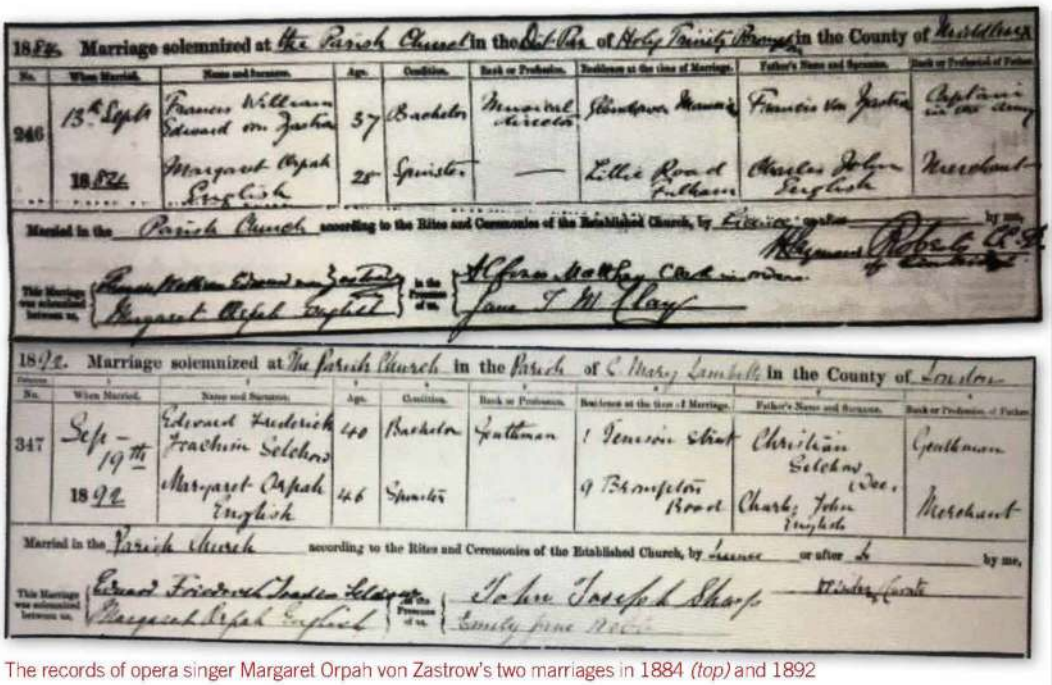
Rebecca Probert is professor of law at the University of Exeter

Steve Thomas is a genealogist with over 20 years' experience

Phil Tomaselli is a military family history expert and author

Alison Toplis is a dress and textile historian

Helen Whittle is a member of AGRA based in IWest Sussex



The records of opera singer Margaret Orpah von Zastrow's two marriages in 1884 *(top)* and 1892

Was Margaret Orpah von Zastrow a bigamist?

Q Margaret Orpah von Zastrow, the niece of my husband's great great grandfather, was born into a Liverpool shipping firm, but became an opera singer using the stage name Madge Inglis.

In 1884, aged 28, she married Francis William Edward von Zastrow, a musical director. In May 1880, Francis had been arrested for receiving stolen goods, and had used the alias Francis Edward Selchow.

In 1892, Margaret married again to an Edward Frederick Joachim Selchow, declaring she was single.

When Margaret died in 1898, a newspaper obituary referred to her husband as Francis von Zastrow and it was he who registered her death. When he died the following year, he was buried in the same plot as Margaret.

Was Margaret's second marriage bigamous, and who was Edward Frederick Joachim Selchow?

Annie Ross

A If Francis von Zastrow and Edward Selchow were different people, then Margaret was almost certainly guilty of bigamy. There is no record of a divorce, and newspaper reports of her and Francis together at musical entertainments in the late 1880s indicate there was no possibility of her relying on the statutory 'seven-year separation' defence. The only other defence, established by case law, was a genuine and reasonable belief that the first spouse had died, but nothing in this case hints at that.

The fact that Francis registered Margaret's death, and was buried alongside her, doesn't rule out the possibility of her having married Edward bigamously. A significant minority of spouses reunited after one of them committed bigamy. Divorce was still expensive, and bigamy didn't always indicate that the first marriage had broken down beyond repair.

That still leaves the question of whether Francis and Edward were actually different people. Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) has a birth record for an Eduard Friedrich Joachim Selchow in Germany in 1852, whereas I can find none for Francis. Neither seems to appear in any UK census, and I can't trace a death record for Edward. So 'Francis von Zastrow' might have been an artistic pseudonym used by Edward. While using a pseudonym would not have invalidated their marriage, there are plenty of examples of couples going through a second ceremony just to be on the safe side. And remarrying one's own spouse does not constitute bigamy.

Rebecca Probert

HAVE YOU HIT A BRICK WALL? Please email your questions or family photographs to the following address: **wdytyaquestions@ourmedia.co.uk**

If selected, your query will be answered on these pages. Please note that we receive a large volume of correspondence each month, and cannot reply to each message individually. You are more likely to receive a response if you keep the question and background information concise (no more than 150 words), with a clear goal of enquiry.

How can I verify that I've found the right birth record?

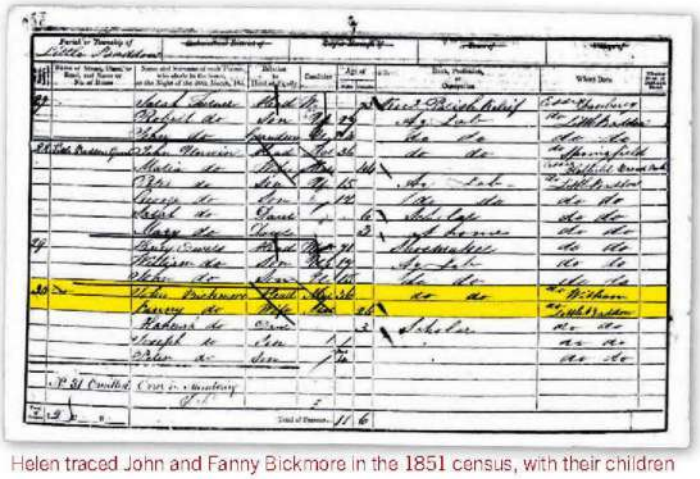
Q I'm looking for details of the parents of my great grandmother, Minnie Bickmore (born 1866). The family story is that her father, John Bickmore, died at sea and her mother, Hannah, died young. On some notes I've found, she was called Minnie Peacock, but this seems unlikely. When she married in 1887, she named her father as John Bickmore, deceased. On the 1891 census, her place of birth was Little Baddow, Essex, but in 1911 it was Sandon, Essex, and in 1901, Standon. I can't locate her in 1871 or 1881. I've found two possible birth certificates for her including one for Little Baddow, but no father is named. I'm also unable to find a marriage for Hannah and John Bickmore.
Jo Woodworth

A The clue here is the surname Peacock and the apparent absence of Minnie in 1871/1881.

I found, in 1871, in Market Place, Romford, J Peacock, a labourer, aged 40; Hannah Peacock, 39; and Minnie, daughter, aged five – all three of them born in Little Baddow.

There's no trace of 'J' or Hannah in 1881, but a Minnie Peacock, 14, is visiting Charles and Elizabeth Rivers in Danbury, all born in Little Baddow.

In 1891 and 1901, James and Hannah Peacock were at Market Place, Romford.



Helen traced John and Fanny Bickmore in the 1851 census, with their children

Working backwards, in 1861 in Little Baddow, I found a James Peacock 34; Hannah Peacock, 32; Joseph Bickmore, relative, aged 12; and Peter Bickmore, relative, aged 11. I also found a marriage for James Peacock and Hannah Unwin that took place in September 1851 in Chelmsford Registration District.

The General Register Office (GRO) indexes show the maiden name of the Bickmore children's mother was Unwin.

In 1851, there's a John Bickmore, age 36; Fanny, 26; Hannah, three; Joseph, two; and Peter, one. John Bickmore and Fanny Unwin married in 1843.

Hannah and Fanny were sisters (baptised together at Little Baddow Independent Church). I suspect that Minnie's mother is John and Fanny's daughter, Hannah. Fanny died in 1854 and Hannah, Minnie's mother, in 1868, so it looks as if Minnie went to live with her great aunt and uncle, James and Hannah Peacock. The Little Baddow birth for Minnie is probably correct.
Helen Whittle

Where is Alice Mustoe's birth registration?

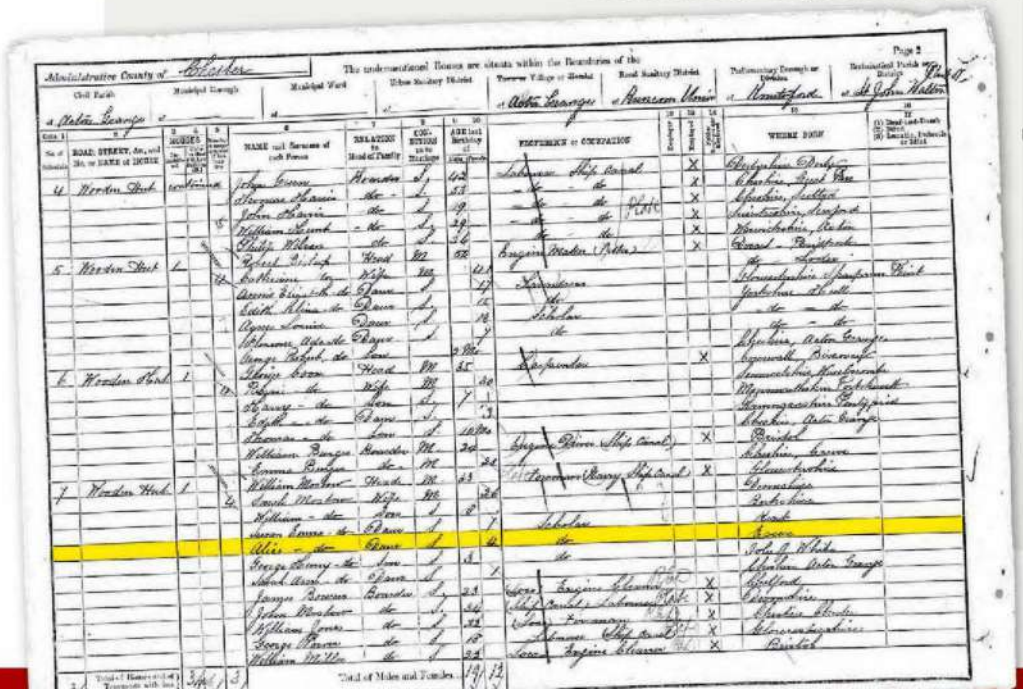
Q Can you advise me how to find the birth registration of my grandmother, Alice Mustoe? She was born on 21 May 1887 in Essex/Tilbury to William Daniel Mustoe and Sarah Hodge Goffin. We've tried the General Register Office (GRO; **www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/**), Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and Essex Record Office (**essexrecordoffice.co.uk**) with no luck, using variants of Mustoe – with and without first names. We also contacted Thurrock Register Office (**thurrock.gov.uk/certificates**) to see if we can access birth records pre-transcription, but this doesn't seem to be possible.
Karen Styles

A Although the GRO indexes do not include the mother's maiden name before 1911, they can be found on Findmypast and the GRO's website. On Findmypast, it's possible to search using just the mother's surname. A message states that this can only be used from 1911 onwards, but it works for earlier years. So search for Alice leaving her surname blank, but with her mother's maiden name. Use the wildcard '*' in case of misspelling (eg Surname – Mus*, Mother's name – G*n).

Although errors in the GRO indexes occasionally occur, you found that you cannot access the original records at the local register office. Since you have a supposed date of birth for Alice, apply to Thurrock Register Office for a copy of the birth certificate. While the application might be fruitless, if the registration was omitted from the indexes, it would solve the mystery of the missing certificate.

The censuses indicate that Alice was born in 1882–1887, so treat her birthdate with caution and extend your search – especially as a public tree on Ancestry suggests Alice's brother, George, was born just six months after her. The censuses also show that the family moved very frequently, so look for registrations outside Essex.

Finally, because of the family's moves, perhaps the birth was never registered. If so the only proof of her parentage may be from the censuses, unless you find a baptism.
Katherine Cobb



The record of Karen's grandmother Alice Mustoe in the 1891 census, which was taken on 5 April

Picture Analysis

When was this group portrait taken?

Q I've found this photo among some family papers and wonder if you can give me an idea of when it might have been taken.
Jean Stephens

A This *carte de visite* studio portrait of five ladies, taken by a Wolverhampton photographer, is really interesting and probably dates from around 1900 or just into the early 1900s.

The popularity of coloured card mounts for photographs grew from the late 1880s, with dark shades favoured in the 1890s. After the exuberance of the more ornate mounts of the early 1890s, the fashionable simplicity of an understated matte-finished mount, especially in dark grey, came to the fore around the turn of the century. Detailing and texture was important, with pressed-in borders, hatching and incised lettering, as here. By the later Edwardian period, the mount was no longer as important, superseded by the postcard and plainer slip-in photo cards.

The women sit in a studio setting with a painted backdrop of palms. Their clothing reflects their varying ages, with the woman seated at the front right wearing contemporary fashionable dress, the others in garments fashionable in at least the previous decade, if not earlier, showing how the age of the sitter needs to be considered when using clothing to date photos. Apart from the bonnet of the elderly woman in the centre, their hats are their most fashionable items, accessories easier and cheaper to update than clothing.
Alison Toplis

1 HATS
Wide-brimmed, shallow-crowned, plate-like – the hats of the younger women help to date the photograph. These were decorated with a variety of bows, flowers and feathers.

2 CONSERVATIVE DRESS
The oldest sitter has garments that probably originate from the early 1890s, but may have been adapted. Bonnets were only worn by older women.

3 SILHOUETTE
An hourglass silhouette and puffed sleeves were popular c1896–1897. The high neckline here is embellished with a bar brooch.

4 SEPARATES
The separate printed blouse and skirt make this woman the most fashionable of the five sitters, and enable the photograph to be dated using her full-sleeved blouse, puffed at the front, and tailored plain cloth skirt.

5 POLKA DOTS
This decoration had been popular since the polka craze of the mid-19th century, when the dance of the same name first became fashionable.

Who was the 'Anitear' living with my ancestors?

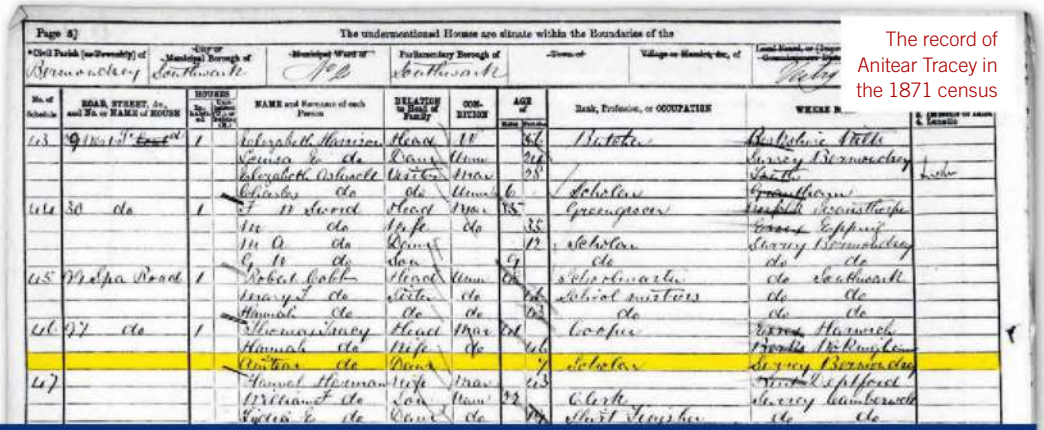
Q My ancestor, Thomas Tracey, married a woman named Hannah in 1858. In the 1871 census, they are listed with a daughter aged seven, born in Bermondsey, where they were living. However, she was not included in subsequent censuses. Her name in the record is illegible. Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) have transcribed it as "Anitear", but I can find no record of a birth, death or marriage in that name.
Alan Futter

A The enumerator's neat handwriting and minimal corrections suggest this was written up from notes after their visits. They were poorly paid. In 1871, they received one guinea for the first 400 people, and 2s 6d for every 100 thereafter, with a proportional payment per person over the 100. It has been suggested that inventing people would have profited them.

It is very difficult to say whether this was the case here. "Anitear" looks more like a botched and altered entry for "Amelia", who he has attributed to a couple who had one son, Thomas John Tracey, born in Holborn in 1859 and apparently dying there in the next year. There are no other children registered with a mother's name Goble, which was Hannah's maiden name.

Was the child a visitor, perhaps from the school next door, who was assumed to be a daughter? Another correction was made to the number of males and females at the foot of the page. This may indicate some uncertainty.

Searches for an Amelia or Anita born in Bermondsey in 1863/1864 produced some candidates, but in this case all of the children found could be accounted for in registration or later censuses. It does seem as if the entry is a mistake by the enumerator. Proving her existence under another alias would involve protracted searches.
Steve Thomas

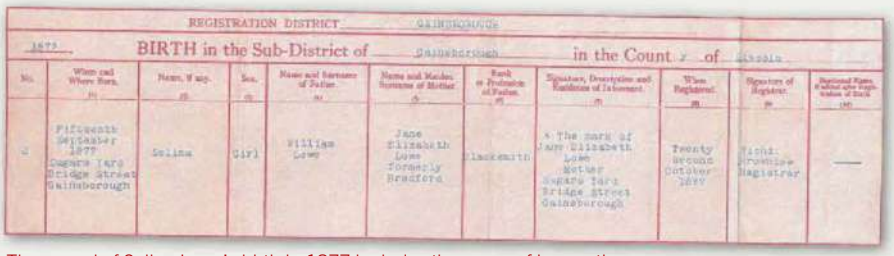


The record of Anitear Tracey in the 1871 census

TOP TIP Always remember that even official records – from birth, marriage and death registrations to census entries – can contain errors. Think about how the record was compiled, keep an open mind and look at all parts of the record for clues.

Where was my great grandmother after 1877?

Q I'm looking for any information about my great grandmother, Jane Elizabeth Bradford. The only facts I have about her are from the birth certificate of my grandmother, Selina Lowe (born 1877), which records her mother as Jane Elizabeth Lowe, formerly Bradford. The next time she turns up is in the 1881 census, when she and her father were lodging. In the 1891 census, she was living with her uncle, John Lowe. There was no mention of Jane. Could she have died in childbirth or soon after?
Graham Linton



The record of Selina Lowe's birth in 1877 includes the name of her mother

A When you meet a brick wall like this, always consider alternative spellings of the surname. If using a transcript, as with Selina's birth certificate, could the name have been mistranscribed? Might Bradford be Bradfield or Brailsford? In this case, the typed version matches the original. A search using the General Register Office's website at **www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/** confirmed that Selina's was the only Lowe birth registered between 1872 and 1882 where the mother's maiden name was Bradford.

Since I was unable to find a birth or baptism for Jane Elizabeth, or her marriage to William Lowe, my initial thought was that Selina's parents never married. However, in the 1881–1901 censuses, although Jane Elizabeth was absent and I could find no trace of her, Selina's father was married.

I then found that in November 1876, 10 months before Selina's birth, a William Lowe married Mary Jane Beresford at Holy Trinity, Gainsborough. Given his age (25), this looked as though it could be the marriage of Selina's father, which seemed odd and worth further investigation. In 1881, Mary J Lowe (married, 21, born Gainsborough) was living at Gainsborough with her stepfather, mother and brother, Frank Brailsford. In earlier censuses, Mary Jane's family are recorded as Bradford and the births and baptisms of Mary Jane and her siblings were all registered as Bradford. So, it looks like Jane Elizabeth Bradford and Mary Jane Bradford might have been the same person.
Katherine Cobb

Big Question

What happened to Kenneth Stanley Gilbert after WW1?

Q My wife's great uncle, Kenneth Stanley Gilbert (born 28 February 1897), served in the First World War. We have not been able to find any information about him during or after the war.

We were told by relations that he suffered from shell shock, but have been unable to find positive proof. The last record, apart from photos he sent home, is the 1911 census. He was living with his family at 88 Goldhawk Road, Shepherd's Bush, London.

Are you able to shine any light?
John Haynes

JOHN HAYNES is struggling to research his wife's relation who served in the Army in the First World War

Kenneth Stanley Gilbert in his British Army uniform

A One photo you sent clearly shows a Wolseley helmet on the table next to Kenneth. Designed to protect the head and back of the neck from the sun, this implies service in the Middle East, Africa or India.

Searching for Kenneth on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**), I found photographs of him, in Britain, in the uniform of the Bedfordshire Regiment (the cap badge gives it away), so I looked in the military sections of Ancestry and Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**). There's no service record, but it's possible to work out the skeleton of his career.

First, I checked The National Archives' (TNA's) collection of British Army Medical Index Cards (MICs) at **tinyurl.com/tna-army-mics**, using 'Kenneth Gilbert' and 'Bedfordshire' as search terms. This produced only one candidate, with the regimental numbers 5449 and 201006. Using '201006' and 'Gilbert', I found a medal roll on Ancestry placing Kenneth in the 5th Battalion (Territorial) Bedfordshire Regiment. The Long, Long Trail site (**longlongtrail.co.uk**) says the 5th Bedfords served at Gallipoli between August and December 1915 then moved to Egypt, but Kenneth can't have been at Gallipoli because he wasn't awarded the 1914/15 Star. His MIC only shows the British War Medal and Victory Medal, so he must have gone overseas after 1915. Possibly he'd served in the 2/5th or 3/5th battalions in the UK (which sent men to the 1/5th when needed) earlier.

One of the photos Kenneth sent home

The 5th Bedfords' War Diary for Egypt isn't digitised (although the diary for Gallipoli is on Ancestry), so a visit to TNA is necessary to see it (WO 95/4653). They must have suffered heavy casualties (probably mostly due to sickness) as, on 12 February 1916, they received a reinforcement of 420 men. For most of 1916, the men were training or working on the defences of the Suez Canal. Regular small reinforcements came in, so it's impossible to say when Kenneth arrived. From 1917 until the Armistice with Turkey on 31 October 1918, they took part in the Battles of Gaza and the advance that followed. The Long, Long Trail covers the campaign in detail.

As to what happened to Kenneth, I can't locate him in the UK either. I've searched the pension cards (on Forces War Records **uk.forceswarrecords.com** and the Western Front Association's website **www.westernfrontassociation.com**) finding no reference to him, nor was he awarded a Silver War Badge. The medal roll mentioned earlier shows his medals were issued, but not returned. He doesn't appear in the records of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (**cwgc.org**), so he almost certainly wasn't killed.

The War Diary suggests one possibility. By June 1919, most men had returned home. The Army was desperate for experienced soldiers. Did Kenneth re-enlist and serve after 1921? If so, his record should be with TNA. Try **discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/mod-open-foi-request-step1**, specifically for those born before 1909. It's a long shot, but it might be worth looking for him entering Australia or Canada because they were big favourites for emigrating soldiers.
Phil Tomaselli

Does this photo depict my great great grandfather?

Q My family believe this soldier is my great great grandfather, Walter Brain (1846–1912). I can't find any other military connections to Walter. Can you tell anything from his uniform?
Anna Wilson

A This is a splendid photograph, but I can safely say it isn't Walter Brain. Everything points to a soldier in the First World War. I searched on Findmypast (**findmypast.co.uk**) and Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) for Walter having served earlier, and found nobody convincing. I see that he had several sons who would have been of age though. One, Walter James, served in the Army Service Corps in France while another, Edward, was killed on 9 May 1917 serving with the Royal West Kents in France, and was buried at Warlincourt Halte British Cemetery. Other sons probably served too, and should be checked.

There are 26 Brains on the Gloucestershire Regiment medal roll (in Ancestry's 'UK, World War I Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920') – it might be worth a browse.

The cap badge is problematic. It seems to have a scroll beneath, possibly with a harp above (Tyneside Irish, Liverpool Irish or Connaught Rangers) or, again possibly, the Tank Corps. I'd look for regiments close to Gloucester though, because volunteers usually did so locally.

One idea: the Canadian Army used the Lee Enfield rifle in the war. The Library and Archives Canada First World War Personnel Records database at **https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/help/pffww** lists 30 Brains who served. Could any of the family have migrated to Canada?
Phil Tomaselli

1 RIFLE

The rifle is a breech-loaded weapon with a magazine (the bolt sticks out above the stock, and a pale shape above is the bottom of the magazine). Magazine rifles (Lee Metfords) only became available during the late 1880s.

2 COAT

His raincoat/trench coat, probably of treated canvas, is secured by metal clips and padded with wool or kapok for warmth, with a fur collar. It's unusual, and may have been bought privately.

3 CAP

The cap supplies a date. Folded over the top are two ear flaps to protect from the cold. Introduced in 1915, they were nicknamed 'Gor blimeys' because sergeant majors were supposed to have said this the first time that they saw them.

4 CAP BADGE

The cap badge is indistinct due to reflection, and is discussed in the main section of my answer.

5 POUCHES

The bulky raincoat means that he wears small ammunition pouches and other accoutrements (including a bag and water bottle – 1908 version) on a belt or straps. He also wears gloves – it's clearly cold!

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Wales At War

Rosemary Collins learns about a project interviewing Welsh survivors of the Second World War and other conflicts

Hugh Morgan OBE and Greg Lewis *(back row, second from left and centre)* at the launch of their book. The veterans in the front row are (*left to right*): Archie Thomas, Idwal Davies, Tony Bird and Duncan Hilling, last surviving member of the advance party which entered Hiroshima after the bomb dropped

This year marks 80 years since the end of the Second World War. The conflict is rapidly fading from living memory as the last survivors die, and 2025 has seen the final surviving Battle of Britain pilot John Hemingway pass away at the age of 105, as well as the oldest British veteran of the war Donald Rose at the age of 110.

Since the 1980s, Hugh Morgan OBE, a Welsh historian and author, has worked to preserve the memories of the Second World War. He and his colleagues find and interview people who fought in or lived through the conflict, and he also runs the West Wales Veterans' Archive on behalf of the older person's charity Age Cymru Dyfed, which is dedicated to interviewing veterans of all wars; the material can be accessed digitally via the National Library of Wales' site People's Collection Wales at **peoplescollection.wales/users/44171**. In May, to mark the anniversary of VE Day, publisher Y Lolfa released *World War Two: Voices From Wales – History As Told By Members of Our 'Greatest Generation'* written by Hugh and co-author Greg Lewis, telling the story of the war through 50 of the interviews they've conducted. The book includes interviews with veterans of all three armed forces, as well as those who lived through the war as children and in the civilian services.

We learn from history by talking to the people who experienced these events

It captures world-changing historic events through the eyes of ordinary people. There are moments of comedy. Mary Bott (née Evans), for example, describes working in the Women's Land Army outside Aberystwyth: "We had Italian prisoners of war [working on the farm]. One said to me one day, he would like to take me for a walk with him in the woods. And I said, 'No, you will get into trouble.' He said, 'No trouble, I have the piece of rubber!' "

However, other stories are extremely harrowing, including an interview with Glyn James, who was present at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp: "There was a big pile, and I thought it had been like a theatre – you know, dummies, discarded dummies. But it wasn't that. There was a heap of bodies. And what was most startling again, of course, was that I could see some children, playing about, belonging either to the people that worked in the camp, or not."

Hugh says that interviewing veterans gives him a fascinating insight into history. For example, he met Dennis Tidswell, who served in the control room at RAF Duxford during the Battle of Britain and was then posted to Malta. Dennis took a Kodak box Brownie camera to the island so that he would have photographs of his service. On the front cover of the book is a picture of Dennis on the rear fuselage of an Italian fighter plane after it was shot down.

"When I met him," Hugh says, "I was drawn to this particular photo. I said, 'Dennis, is that really you?' He said, 'You like that, Hugh? Wait there.' Two minutes later he came back, and he put in my hand an instrument from that very Italian fighter that had been shot down over Malta in 1942. I just felt that I was touching history at that moment. I asked him about the instrument and he said quietly, 'Spoils of war, Hugh, spoils of war.' "

Hugh adds that the West Wales Veterans' Archive team are currently digitising nine previously unknown interviews with veterans of the First World War, which were recorded in the 1980s, as well as interviewing Welsh veterans of National Service.

He says that it's more important than ever to remember veterans' stories: "We learn from history by talking to the people who were there and experienced these world events at the time, and I think with the way the world is today it's important we learn their lessons."

TELL YOUR STORY

Share your local history project with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *rosemary.collins@ourmedia.co.uk*

Discover More

West Wales Veterans' Archive
w **peoplescollection.wales/users/44171**

You can access the archive digitally via the above website. Hugh's book *World War Two: Voices From Wales* (Y Lolfa, 2025; RRP £12.99) is available now. For every copy sold, a donation is made to Age Cymru Dyfed to sustain the collection of stories for the archive.

MARTIN CAVANEY

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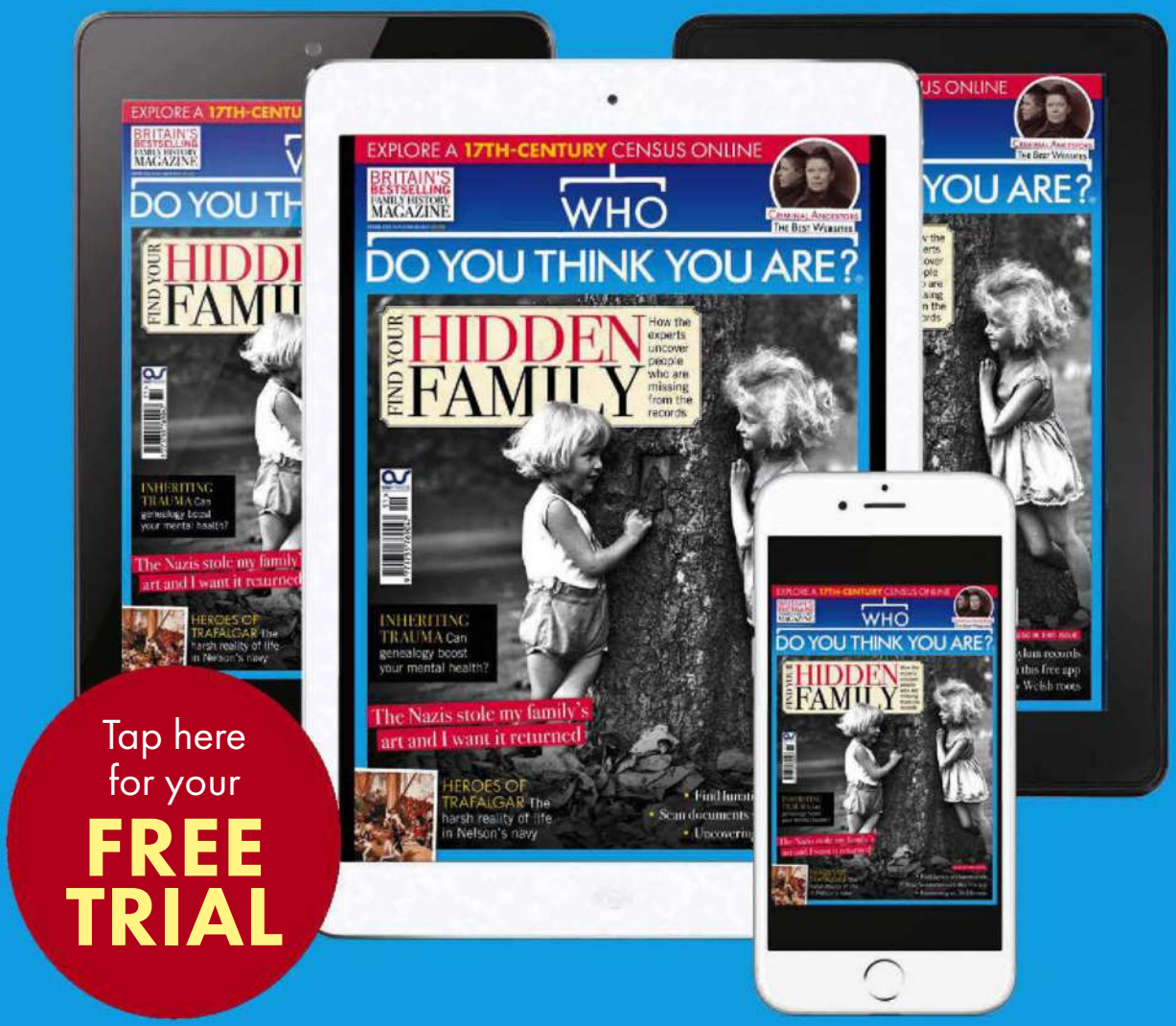

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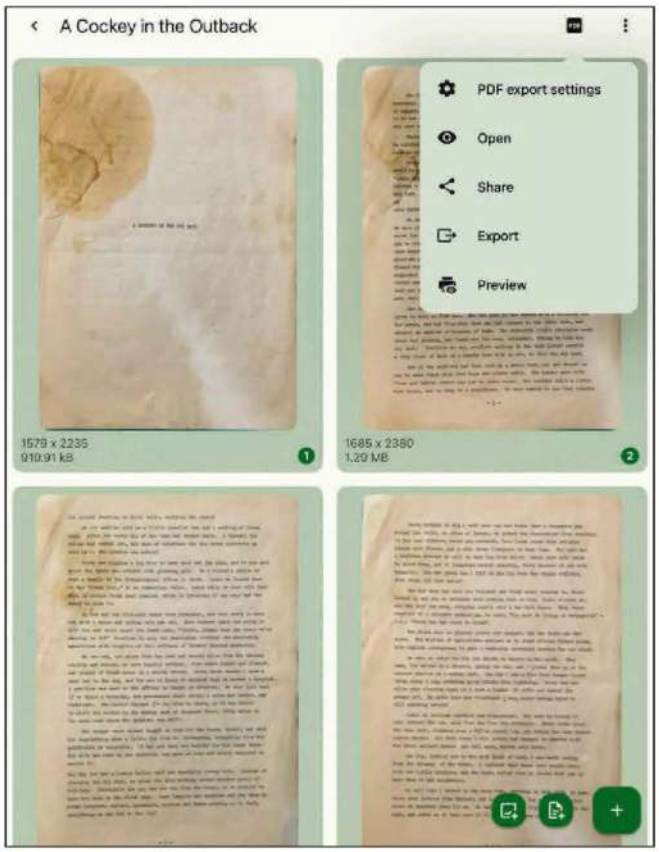


Scan documents with your phone or tablet

Nick Peers reveals how to scan and extract text from documents using a fantastic free app

Back in our Summer 2018 issue we showcased Microsoft Lens, a brilliant free tool for scanning documents using your smartphone or tablet. Sadly the company has recently announced that it's retiring the app. But don't worry, the good news is that you can enjoy all of Microsoft Lens' functionality for free with OSS Document Scanner, which is available for both Android and iOS.

If you're switching from Microsoft Lens then you'll have a good idea about what it can do. If you're new to the concept, then OSS Document Scanner turns your smartphone or tablet's camera into a scanner. Line up your document in the viewfinder and watch OSS Document Scanner magically detect the edges. Snap the shot, and the app automatically straightens the document to produce a full-screen image scan. This can be further enhanced, and you can even run optical character recognition (OCR) on typewritten documents to extract text to copy and edit in a word processor.

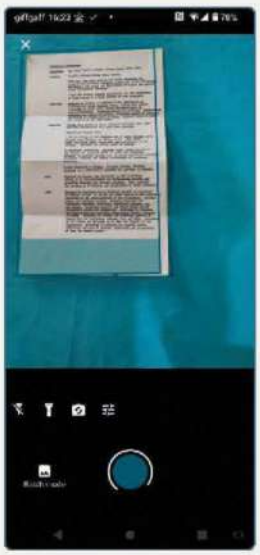
Simply search the App Store (iOS) or Google Play Store (Android) for OSS Document Scanner to locate, download and install the app, then follow our advice.

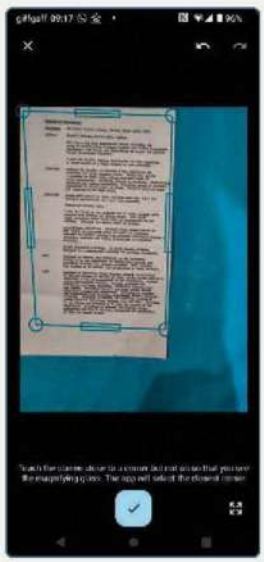
TOP TIP!

Tap the Settings button on the main screen and select 'Document detection' to experiment with different options that might improve your OCR results.

1 Set Up Your Scanning Space Choose a suitable area to place the documents you wish to scan – we recommend good natural lighting, with the light source behind you, and a flat surface with plain covering like a table. If you suffer from shaky hands, consider mounting your phone on a suitable tripod. Place the document on the surface, then launch OSS Document Scanner on your phone or tablet.

2 Scan And Review You'll be prompted to add a document using the camera, or import an existing image as a new scan. Tap the camera button and line up the document in your viewfinder. Hold the camera as still as possible while OSS Document Scanner detects and scans your document. Once done, review the result – tap the Trash button followed by 'Delete' if the quality is poor, and start again.





3 Crop The Scan Manually The app attempts to crop and straighten your image automatically, but if you're not happy with its suggestion, don't automatically delete the image; instead, tap the Crop button (bottom left) to access a screen where you can change the crop marks manually by tapping and dragging on a corner or edge. Tap the Tick button to see if you've improved the scan.

4 Make Additional Enhancements

Explore the buttons along the bottom of the screen next to Crop – you can rotate the image and perform various one-tap enhancements. These include a sharpen filter (tap 'Enhance') as well as various auto-colour options. You can also manually adjust the brightness and contrast. Experiment to make the text as legible as possible.

7 Share Your Document

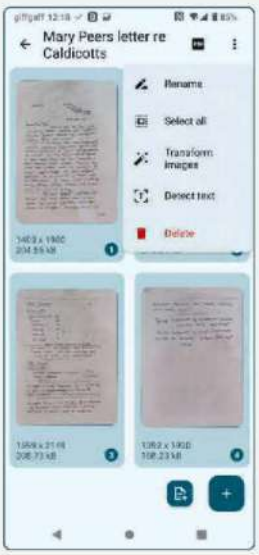
Tap the button to the left of the Overlay Text button to copy the text to your clipboard so you can paste it into an email or other app, or tap X to close the screen. To share the scan as an image, tap the Share button above the T. To export, print or share it as a PDF file that has the resulting OCR text embedded in it, so you can copy and extract it, tap the PDF button and make your choice from the dropdown menu.

5 Extract The Text

The final button – T – will perform OCR on the image to extract any readable text. The first time you use it, you'll be prompted to download the English-language pack. Once done, choose a quality setting ('Best' is selected by default) and click 'Start'. If you subsequently scan in foreign-language documents, tap + to select – and download – additional language packs.

8 Add More Pages

When you're finished, tap the document's name at the top of the screen to change it from the default – the date and time of the scan – to something more descriptive and easily recognisable. Once saved, tap the Back button to return to the document's summary screen where you can add more pages in the same fashion as before. Note that you can process multiple pages together by tapping the three vertical dots to perform bulk actions on them all.



6 Review The Text

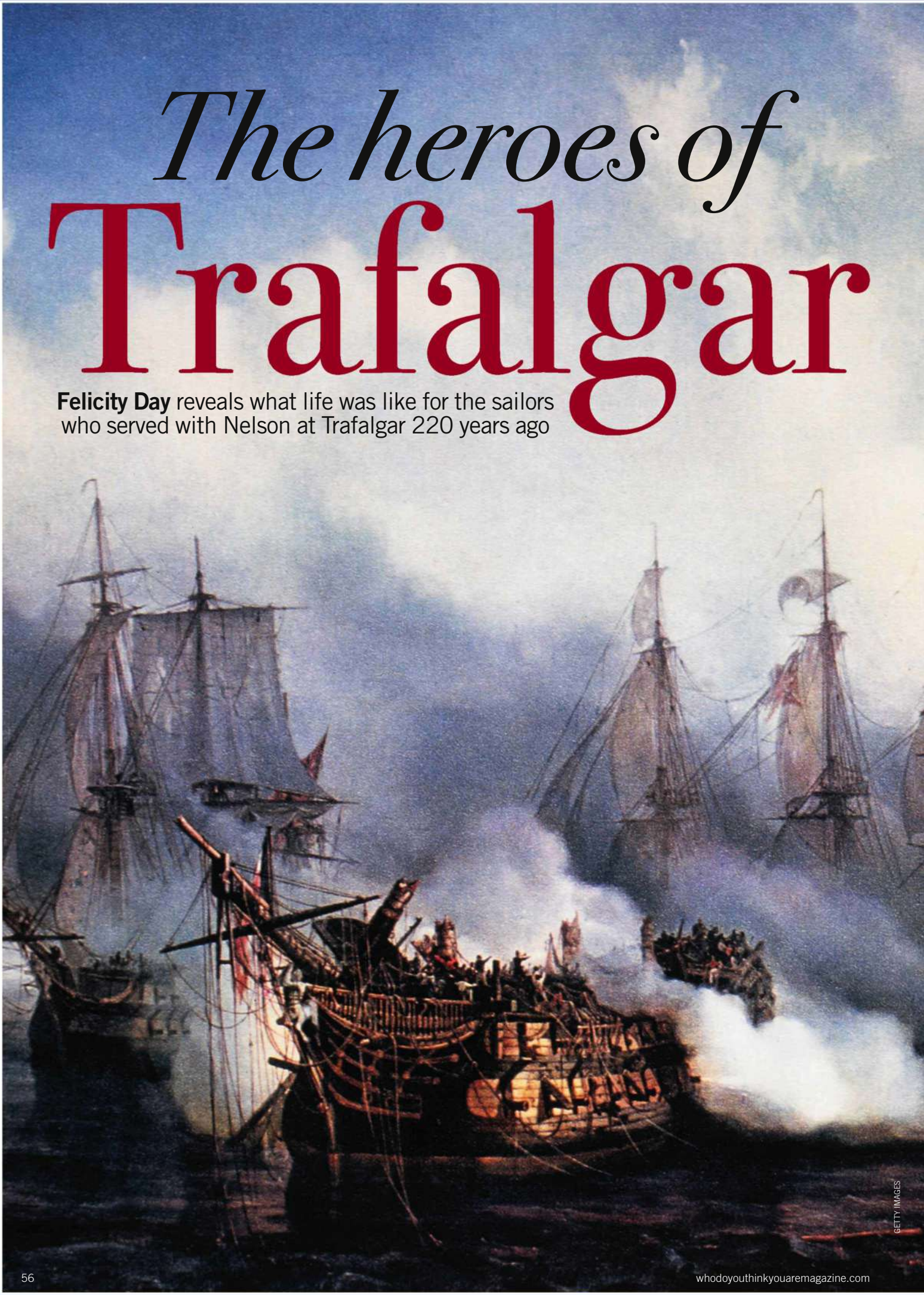
A progress bar will appear as the text is scanned, recognised and converted. Once complete, you'll see a pair of icons floating over the image on the right. Tap the T button at the bottom to view the results of your OCR conversion. The quality of the transcription will of course be affected by the legibility of the original text; if it's poor, try a different enhancement and repeat Step 5.

9 Manage Your Documents

Tap Back again to return to the main screen where your scanned document is stored in the app – tap the buttons at the bottom to scan more documents or import previously saved images. Use this screen to manage and navigate your collection; you can tap the View button as shown (it looks like a fractured square) to switch to a condensed view as your collection grows or to change the display order.

The heroes of Trafalgar

Felicity Day reveals what life was like for the sailors who served with Nelson at Trafalgar 220 years ago



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On 21 October 1805, smoke filled the skies over the seas west of Cape Trafalgar, a headland in the Province of Cádiz in the south-west of Spain, as a fierce battle raged. After nearly five hours of intense fighting against a combined French and Spanish force, Britain's Royal Navy emerged victorious in a clash that still echoes as loudly as the thundering guns in the annals of British history, not least because of the loss of Admiral Lord Nelson, the mastermind of the triumphant battle plan and a national hero. But the story of Trafalgar is far more than the story of Nelson: it is the story of our ancestors too, since there were 821 men aboard his flagship, HMS *Victory*, on that fateful day, 18,000 men in the fleet of 27 British vessels involved, and some 110,000 serving in the Navy as a whole.

They were Britain's foremost fighting force in 1805, in the midst of the wars with France that lasted (with only brief pauses) from 1793 until 1815. It was the Navy who stood between the French emperor Napoleon and an invasion of Britain, and as the war went on proved vital in protecting British trade routes and safeguarding the supply lines of the Duke of Wellington's army, establishing an undisputed supremacy over the seas.

Floating Fortresses

Their great wooden warships were floating fortresses, carrying as many as 1,000 souls. They had their own chaplains and cooks, surgeons and carpenters, and their company was a microcosm of Georgian society: younger sons of earls rubbed shoulders with the scions of tradesmen and shared the decks with everyone from ▶

A depiction of the Battle of Trafalgar by French painter Auguste Mayer

former smugglers to runaway apprentices. There were men from every corner of Britain, and much further afield: the muster roll for *Victory* shows 22 nationalities represented at Trafalgar, with Americans, West Indians and even Frenchmen among the crew. There were women – wives, and ladies of more dubious reputation – and children too. Plus a complement of Royal Marines, or 'lobsters' as sailors dubbed the red-coated, seagoing soldiers.

To serve aboard a 'man-of-war' (a warship or frigate, usually with cannon) was patriotic and highly respectable – especially after the future William IV was sent to sea. It was a favoured career option for sons of the well-to-do, requiring no expensive education yet offering the potential for riches and a social rise. Many were enlisted as children; Bernard Frederick Coleridge, nephew of the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, was an adventurous boy of 11 when he joined as a midshipman (in training for the officer class) in 1804.

Admiral Nelson lies on the deck of HMS *Victory* after being fatally wounded by a French marksman

Forced To Serve

In the case of the seamen, who made up the majority of the crew, there was a chance they had been seized and forced into service by the pressgang, working for a military hungry for recruits in a war before universal conscription. Officially, their targets were experienced fishermen and merchant sailors (who would be 'rated' as 'able seamen' and paid accordingly), but those with no seafaring skills were 'impressed' too. It was a controversial policy, but pressganging might not have been as common as is often believed. Establishing a precise figure is fraught with difficulty, but one 2015 study suggests that over 80 per cent of recruits were volunteers in the early years of the wars with France.

There were attractions, not least the potential to supplement pay with prize money – the proceeds from the sale of captured ships and their cargoes, shared between the crew according to their rank. Officers benefited most, but by 1808 a seamen might earn the equivalent of four months' wages for a seized vessel. The Navy also offered travel and adventure at a time when most Britons hardly strayed beyond their home town, and an escape from blighting poverty. Although it demanded separations from loved ones lasting months or years, and pay was less than that of a labourer on the land, sailors had free accommodation; medical treatment; plenty of beer, wine or grog (usually diluted rum); and food on their plates every day.

Crews were actually fairly well fed, given the logistical challenges of supplying ships sailing halfway round the world. There was meat four days a week and sizeable portions, although the fare was only really appetising when the ship was in port or not far from it. By the time a ship had been at sea for weeks, fresh meat, vegetables and bread would have been replaced with beef or pork that had been caked in salt to preserve it – sometimes years earlier – as well as the legendary ship's biscuit: dried bread touted at the time as "good for a whole year after it was baked", but which quickly deteriorated and crawled with

A cross-section of HMS *Victory* showing how it was equipped in 1805

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Charles Hare 1789–1859

How a prisoner of war made a daring escape from France

Charles Hare was 13 years old and two years into his Royal Navy career when his ship, HMS *Minerve*, was captured by the French in 1803, and all hands taken prisoner. As Napoleon steadfastly refused the usual prisoner exchanges, the midshipman spent the next six years as a captive, until he pulled off an audacious escape.

Charles left the prison in the town of Sarre Libre (now Saarlouis in Germany) disguised as a French customs officer, having persuaded one of them to obtain him false documents, a uniform *(pictured)* and a hired carriage. He then embarked on a treacherous two-week sprint across Europe. Had he been caught, he would undoubtedly have faced execution for espionage, but the teenage sailor reached Rotterdam in the Netherlands without discovery. Friendly fishermen rowed him out to a British ship blockading the harbour, which carried him home to England. Short of money, he then walked the 30 miles from Grimsby to be reunited with his family.

He was back at sea just two months later, promoted to lieutenant, and after the war continued to sail, as captain on a merchant ship. The gripping tale of his prison break was written down for his son in 1832, and preserved with his disguise by his proud descendants.

maggots and weevils. Meanwhile, the drinking water, stored in casks or collected from rivers, was thick and stinking – "enough to poison a person" as midshipman Coleridge wrote to his mother – and often diluted with wine.

The cattle, pigs and hens carried for food contributed to the dirt and stench of a warship. There were always rats aboard, and lice and fleas spread easily – not least because the men were reluctant to wash either their clothes or bodies in seawater. The residue of salt it left on clothes made them prone to damp, and sailors were generally wet and cold enough from the inclement weather at sea.

Admirals and captains had light-filled cabins, akin to hotel suites, but the rest of the crew lived cheek by jowl. The cabins of the junior officers were separated by partitions of the flimsiest kind that could be removed before battle, creating one large artillery platform, while the seamen slept in hammocks, hung so close together that they nearly touched. With the ports closed by necessity overnight, the air in a "cavern of about six feet in height" containing some 500 men was "hot and foul" according to chaplain Edward Mangin, whose *Miscellaneous Essays* (Hope and Co., 1851) is freely available from the Internet Archive at **tinyurl.com/arch-mangin**. There was no undisturbed slumber even on cool, calm nights when the ship wasn't pitching violently; the crew was (usually) divided into two watches, each working four hours on, four hours off day and night, with two-hour shifts in between.

There were always rats aboard, and lice and fleas spread easily

Discipline was harsh, with neglect of duty often punished with a flogging, which saw the miscreant sailor tied to a grate and lashed on his bare back, sometimes dozens of times, with the cat-o'-nine-tails – a whip comprising nine knotted strands of rope, which lacerated the skin. While some captains were loath to sanction such brutality, many officers considered it a necessary evil to maintain order and harmony. And violent revolts against conditions or authority were rare. Mutinies were generally more akin to workers' strikes and peaceably resolved, according to historian James Davey. In fact, where crews did usurp authority, they sometimes continued to dish out floggings.

Battle Stations

To be a strong team was essential in the face of skirmishes with the French. As soon as an order was given to "Clear for action" there was a practised routine. Anything that might obstruct the guns or splinter on impact was stowed or tossed overboard; ports were lifted, the cannons run out and the seamen bound handkerchiefs around their heads for protection against the guns' roar (which still left them deaf for days afterwards). The surgeon set up his base below the waterline, and marines were posted at doorways to stop deserters. "I felt a difficulty in swallowing," wrote impressed seaman Charles Reece Pemberton, recalling in an autobiographical sketch his terror before a battle in 1808.

Battle injuries could certainly be horrific: sailors might be cut ▶

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HMS *Belleisle* was severely damaged during the Battle of Trafalgar, even losing its mast

▶ in half, or have their heads shot clean off. Flying splinters of wood savaged limbs; one account tells of 16 amputations at Trafalgar on HMS *Tonnant* alone, with just two patients surviving their ordeal. After the battle, the upper deck of HMS *Belleisle* was left covered in "blood and mangled remains" and, being littered with splintered wood, scattered sails and ropes too, "resembled a shipwright's yard strewed with gore", said Lieutenant Paul Nicholas, in an account published in 1829. A sombre clean-up followed, carried out with a "regularity and order" – and characteristic stoicism – that astonished French officer Captain Prigny when he witnessed it. "All *our* seamen were either drunk or disabled," he later said.

Grim Aftermath

When ships were clear of danger, there was time to sew the bodies of the deceased into their hammocks and, with a few words of prayer, slide them overboard – a ritual that was routine. Death stalked Royal Navy ships at all times, and in fact warfare was far from the greatest hazard. Estimates suggest that only about 7 per cent of the 100,000 or so seamen who perished between 1793 and 1815 died in action. Navigation was more like speculation in turbulent waters or skies thick with fog, while storms, lightning strikes and shipwrecks claimed many more British ships than combat, accounting for some 13 per cent of deaths in total.

But the biggest killers, together responsible for 80 per cent of all lives lost, were diseases like yellow fever and typhus, and shipboard accidents such as the one that killed Frederick Coleridge. At the tender age of 13, he toppled off the top-mast of HMS *Phoenix* to an instant death. No wonder that crews prayed daily to be preserved not only from "the violence of the enemy" but also "the dangers of the sea".

FELICITY DAY is a historian and the author of *The Game of Hearts: True Stories of Regency Romance* (Blink, 2024)

Resources

Take your research further

BOOKS

In Nelson's Wake: The Navy and the Napoleonic Wars
James Davey
Yale University Press, 2015
Davey sets the experiences of our late Georgian Royal Navy ancestors in context.

Jack Tar: Life in Nelson's Navy
Roy and Lesley Adkins
Little, Brown, 2008
The authors paint a picture of day-to-day life for ordinary seamen in the Napoleonic Wars.

MUSEUMS

HMS VICTORY
a **Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, HM Naval Base, Portsmouth PO1 3LJ**
t 023 9283 9766
w **historicdockyard.co.uk/attractions/hms-victory/**
The world's oldest commissioned warship was saved for the nation.

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM
a **Romney Road, Greenwich, London SE10 9NF**
t 020 8858 4422
w **rmg.co.uk/national-maritime-museum**
The gallery 'Nelson, Navy, Nation' explores life in the Royal Navy (1688–1815), and houses the coat Nelson wore at Trafalgar and Charles Hare's French uniform.

WEBSITES

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES
w **nationalarchives.gov.uk/aboutapps/trafalgarancestors/**
Search TNA's database to find out if your forebear fought at Trafalgar on the side of the Royal Navy. The web page is showing its age, but the database still works.

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? MAGAZINE
w **tinyurl.com/wdytya-find-royal-navy-recs**
Locate Royal Navy service records from the Napoleonic era right up to the Second World War.

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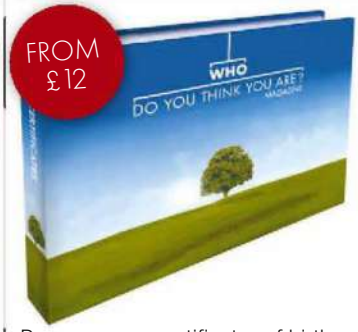

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'My Unusual Middle Name Led Me To My Medieval Relations'

Investigating the origin of his middle name led Steven Devonald Williams to Plantagenet kings and the inspiration for one of Heath Ledger's greatest roles. Interview by **Gail Dixon**

When I was born I was given the middle name of Devonald, like my father Andrew, my grandfather Hugh and my great grandfather William. It's derived from the Old Welsh name Dumngual, which contains Celtic references meaning 'world' and 'might rule'.

My great grandfather William Devonald Williams was born in 1888 and worked as a signalman on the Great Western Railway in Carmarthenshire. He was the first ancestor I knew of to have that middle name. His parents were Henry Williams, who was also a signalman, and his wife Martha.

STEVEN WILLIAMS lives near Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, Wales, and works for a supermarket

Name Mystery

Devonald was obviously a name of significance to the Williams family, so naturally I wanted to know where it came from and why it was important. I began researching my family history hoping to solve the mystery.

About 13 years ago, I ordered a copy of William's birth certificate, and discovered that his mother's maiden name was Devonald. I didn't know it at the time, but Martha Devonald would turn out to be a gateway ancestor to our medieval history.

Martha married Henry Williams in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, in 1887, and my great grandfather was born a year later. In the past, children were often given their mother's maiden name as a middle name.

Martha Devonald was a farmer's daughter from Ambleston, Pembrokeshire, so there was nothing of great significance there. She was born c1857, and in the 1861 census she was living with her widowed father Thomas, her sister Margaret and cousin Thomas.

I began tracing Martha's Devonald line on Ancestry (**ancestry.co.uk**) and FamilySearch (**familysearch.org**), and was astonished to discover that it led back to the 14th century. A variety of sources proved this, mainly birth, marriage and death records, and wills.

My Breakthrough

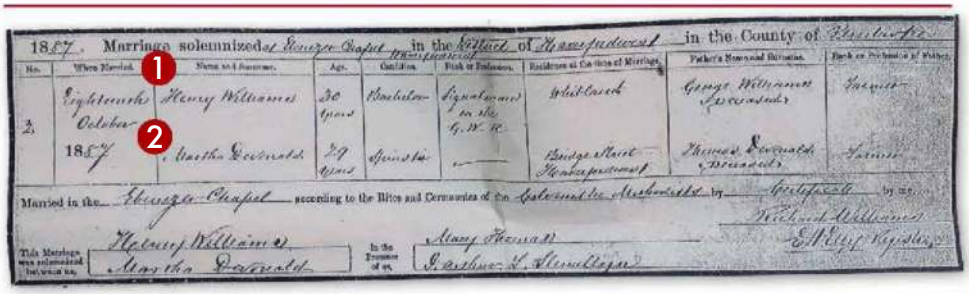
A year ago, I was told by another researcher that the Devonalds were originally members of the gentry from north Pembrokeshire, and the branch that I descend from moved to south Pembrokeshire. This made sense because Martha's 6x great grandfather John Devonald married Sage Picton, whose ancestors were a famous landed family in Pembrokeshire.

Sage was born in the early 17th century in the parish of Nevern, Pembrokeshire, and married John in 1630. Researching her ancestry resulted in some fascinating connections.

The Pictons are well-documented Welsh nobles and their family seat was Picton Castle, near Haverfordwest. Sage's great grandfather was Sir John Philipps who lived at Picton Castle during early Tudor times. His family produced historically important political figures, including sheriffs, lord lieutenants and members of Parliament.

Marriage Record, 1887

This document revealed the origin of Steven's middle name 'Devonald'



1887. Marriage solemnized at Ebenezer Chapel in the District of Haverfordwest in the County of Pembroke

No.	When Married	Name and Surname	Age	Condition	Rank or Profession	Residence at the time of Marriage	Father's Name and Surnames	Rank or Profession of Father
2.	Eighteenth October 1887	Henry Williams	20 years	Bachelor	Signalman in the G.W.R.	Whitchurch	George Williams Deceased	Farmer
		Martha Devonald	29 years	Spinster	—	Bridge Street Haverfordwest	Thomas Devonald (Deceased)	Farmer

Married in the Ebenezer Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Calvinistic Methodists by Certificate by me Richard Williams Registrar

This Marriage was solemnized between us Henry Williams Martha Devonald

In the Presence of us Mary Thomas Esther L. Llewellyn

1 **Henry Williams**
Steven's great great grandfather got married on 18 October 1887 in Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire. His occupation is recorded: he was a signalman for the Great Western Railway.

2 **Martha Devonald**
Devonald proved to be the maiden name of Steven's great great grandmother, a gateway ancestor who enabled him to take his research back to medieval times.

Naturally, the Philipps married into other noble families, so a network of highly traceable ancestors emerged. Sir John Philipps married Elizabeth Griffith, whose great great grandfather Sir Edward Stradling married Jane Beaufort. She was the daughter of Cardinal Henry Beaufort, who was born c1374.

As if this wasn't astonishing enough, I discovered that Henry was the son of the Plantagenet military leader John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster.

John was born in 1340 to Edward III and Philippa of Hainault. He became one of the wealthiest landowners in England, and exerted great political influence during the reign of his young nephew Richard II.

When I discovered this I said, "Good grief! I got a lot more than I bargained for." I was even jokingly asked if I'm now in line for the British throne!

Legendary Knight

I've also found four direct connections from Sage Picton to William Marshal, who has been dubbed the greatest knight of all time. The son of John Marshal, a minor nobleman, he was born c1146 and became a wandering knight who earned a living by competing in tournaments.

William was highly skilled in combat and the chivalric code – he also took the vow to become a Knight Templar. He was the inspiration for the lead character William Thatcher in the 2001 film *A Knight's Tale*, starring Australian actor Heath Ledger.

Left: Hugh Williams *(far right)* with his siblings and mother Emma *(centre)*
Right: Emma, her husband William and an evacuee

HAVE YOU BROKEN THROUGH A BRICK WALL?

Share your family story with us and you could appear in the magazine!

Please write to us at the address on page 6 or email *wdytyaeditorial@ourmedia.co.uk*

William proved his mettle on the battlefield, serving for the Crown in Normandy and during the Crusades. He became a very powerful adviser to Henry II, Richard I and King John, and guardian to the young Henry III. He was made the 1st Earl of Pembroke in 1199, and was one of the wealthiest men in England.

At the age of 70, William led an army that conquered French forces and rebellious barons at the Second Battle of Lincoln (1217). This was a pivotal victory in the campaign to ward off invasion.

Discovering such astonishing connections reminded me of actor Danny Dyer's episode of *WDYTYA?* in 2016. I've made a scroll for my niece and nephews to show how our lineage goes back to Edward III and William the Conqueror. It's amazing what just one name can reveal.

GETTY IMAGES

Left to right: Steven has discovered that he's distantly related to Edward III and John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster

Reader Tips

What advice does Steven have for other family historians?

- Ask all of your family members for information, and if they hold any genealogical documents.
- Never take online trees at face value – always check the details against the sources.
- Joining a local family history society or a group studying a particular surname can help you discover new links.

Around Britain

Cumbria

Jonathan Scott celebrates digital developments including the county archive service's new website

Ullswater, near Penrith, is the second largest lake in the Lake District after Windermere

The former historic counties of Cumberland and Westmorland became Cumbria in 1974, at the same time taking bites out of West Riding of Yorkshire and Lancashire. Today the county's archive service, Cumbria Archives, runs four branches in Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven, which between them look after material stretching back to the 11th century. And, according to the archive team, researchers are in the midst of a number of new projects that will "transform access to digitised documents".

This follows the launch of a new-look website at **cumbriaarchives.org.uk** at the end of last year. Senior archivist Robert Baxter says, "We hope it gives researchers an easier and better navigation of our resources and information. Via our 'Catalogues and Guides' section, for example, at **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/catalogues-and-guides** family historians can now browse all sorts of indexes and resources, as well as collections with direct links into our online catalogue CASCAT (**archiveweb.cumbria.gov.uk/CalmView/default.aspx**)."

Staff also hope to roll out an improved version of CASCAT later this year. "And in late 2026 we expect to launch our new Cumbria Archives Portal, which will provide access to a selected range of digitised documents, images and recordings."

Our new Cumbria Archives Portal will provide access to digitised documents

The four Archive Centres look after Church of England parish registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, plus wills proved by the Diocese of Carlisle and some Chester Diocese deaneries. These include parish-chest material, meaning you can access other potential sources of genealogical information. The records of the overseers of the poor, for example, can include account and rate books, as well as settlement records.

All four centres have microform copies of some cross-Cumbrian sources, such as census material

GETTY IMAGES

Free Online Records

Wills and inventories, parish registers, indexes, directories and biographies

Wills And Inventories

w **tinyurl.com/arch-surt-wills**

This 1853 volume contains wills and inventories from the registry of the Archdeaconry of Richmond covering parts of York, Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancaster.

Parish Registers

w **tinyurl.com/fs-cumbria**

FamilySearch has parish register entries from Cumbria (1538–1990). You can see the images at Family History Centers and affiliate libraries.

Indexes

w **tinyurl.com/cumb-ind**

The county archive's site has indexes to the likes of cemetery records, newspaper articles, bastardy bonds and memorial inscriptions.

Biographies

w **cumbrianlives.org.uk**

Cumbrian Lives contains details of "men and women who have been significant in Cumbrian history", including almost 150 full-length entries.

Directories

w **tinyurl.com/sco-dir**

The University of Leicester's website Special Collections Online includes a host of digitised directories for the area listed under both Cumberland and Westmorland, not least a Cumberland Post Office directory from 1858.

and parish registers. But each also has a wide range of material specific to the area.

For example, Kendal Archive Centre (**cumbriaarchives.org.uk/kendal-archive-centre**), which mainly covers the former county of Westmorland, has probate records from the Deaneries of Kendal and Furness and Carlisle Consistory Court (1536–1860) which are available in the reading room at Kendal Library. The closure of County Hall, the centre's home, to the public means that it is currently offering a hybrid service – collections are accessible at the library provided appointments are booked in advance, while "options for future investment in archive services in Kendal" are being investigated.

The collection of estate papers at Barrow (**cumbriaarchives.org.uk/barrow-archive-centre**) reflect the local iron-ore industry, and it looks after some records of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering, which traces its history back to 1871, when James Ramsden founded the Iron Shipbuilding Company. Meanwhile the Cumberland collection, held in Carlisle (**cumbriaarchives.org.uk/carlisle-archive-centre**), has a comprehensive set of militia records, which listed all able-bodied men between 18 and 45.

A train pulls into Eskdale Green Station, c1927

GETTY IMAGES

Finally the Archive Centre in Whitehaven (**cumbriaarchives.org.uk/whitehaven-archive-centre**) preserves extensive maritime collections, including crew agreements listing the crew of any ships registered in port. If you are interested in finding out more about these sources, it's worth visiting the Crew List Index Project (**crewlist.org.uk**) where you can trawl ships registered in Barrow, Carlisle and Whitehaven.

Digitised Registers

Also in the wings are digitised registers of baptisms, burials and marriages from every parish in the Diocese of Carlisle, which earlier this year were scanned as part of the Church of England's National Burial Grounds Survey project (**churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/churchcare-news/national-burial-grounds-survey**).

Robert says they're not yet sure which platform will host the registers, or when they will be available. Tim Viney of Atlantic Geomatics (**atlanticgeomatics.co.** ▶

▶ **uk**), which carried out the survey, adds that the digitisation of the Carlisle registers is now complete, and he hopes that the "information will be available to the public… by the end of the year/early 2026".

While we wait, lots of new finding aids have appeared online since we last visited the area in our September 2021 issue. The team at Barrow, for instance, has published indexes of shipping apprentices (1872–1965), shipyard staff and apprentices, Vickers armaments and submarine drawings, Barrow police (covering 1881–1964), and Furness railway staff.

These have been joined by indexes for Dalton-in-Furness bus drivers/owners (1917–1923), Barrow-in-Furness bus drivers, conductors and omnibuses (1917–1930) and Post Office employees (1860–1927), in addition to registers of births, deaths, admissions and discharges from Ulverston Workhouse.

Robert reveals that volunteers are currently working on indexes to Barrow Workhouse, children evacuated from Barrow in September 1941, and children from Salford and London evacuated to Dalton-in-Furness, Askam, Lindal and Marton between 1939 and 1945.

Coal miners from Haig Colliery in Whitehaven wear breathing apparatus during a practice at Brigham Rescue Station in 1934

Carlisle Archive Centre, meanwhile, has several new additions, including attendance reports, punishment books and newspaper cuttings from Borrowdale Primary School. There are also collections from the Hall family of Waverton, Wigton, and the Bell family of Inglewood House in High Hesket.

The Whitehaven Archive and Local Studies Centre has received a large collection of Methodist records recently, although these are mainly administrative papers not registers. However, a collection from Cleator Moor, for example, does include registers, which have been cleaned and catalogued. And Cumbria Archives has been gifted the Curwen Archive, a significant family and estate collection, under the Government's Acceptance in Lieu scheme, which enables works of art and heritage objects to be transferred to public ownership in place of inheritance tax.

The industrial collections at Whitehaven Archive include records of the British Steel Corporation and its predecessors. There's not all that much material for ordinary workers, but you can access registers of shareholders and directors, minutes and correspondence, accounts, material relating to individual plants, as well as a holiday savings fund. In addition researcher John Lawson has supplied his index to the photographs in the archive, which will soon be incorporated into the online catalogue.

Finally Kendal's conservation and digitisation teams have been focusing on the preservation and cataloguing of various collections that are unique to the region.

The company K Shoes, for example, was founded by Robert Miller Somervell in 1842, and is estimated to have employed one fifth of the town's working population in the 1960s. The collection includes a number of sources that might be of use to family historians, and it too has recently been catalogued.

Finally a long-serving volunteer has catalogued the Percy Duff photographic archive, which includes images of local people at school, work and play.

TOP TIP!

If you can't find a marriage record in Cumbria, check places in Scotland near the border such as Gretna Green and Lamberton Toll. See the Scotland's People site: **tinyurl.com/scot-peo-irr**.

LOCAL INDUSTRY

SNUFF Did your hard-working Cumbrian relation have the sweet smell of success?

Men take snuff at the Epsom Derby in Surrey on 5 June 1948

Tobacco was imported through the port of Whitehaven in the first half of the 18th century, and Kendal became home to snuff mills on Natland Beck and Mealbank. There the tobacco would be roasted and ground to a powder in water-powered grinders, before being blended, wrapped and sold. You can learn more about snuff and many other topics, from aviation and lime to pottery and windmills, via the alphabetical guide at the Cumbria Industrial History Society's site the Industrial History of Cumbria: **cumbria-industries.org.uk**.

GETTY IMAGES

CUMBRIA DIRECTORY

ARCHIVES & LIBRARIES

Cumbria Archives
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk**
The county archive service's site has plenty of digital resources, and sections for the four Archive Centres it runs – see below.

Barrow Archive Centre
a **Ramsden Square, Barrow-in-Furness LA14 1LL**
t 01229 407377
e *barrow.archives@cumberland.gov.uk*
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/barrow-archive-centre**
The centre preserves collections for Westmorland, plus parts of Cumbria that used to be in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Industrial material includes the records of Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering.

Carlisle Archive Centre
a **Lady Gillford's House, Petteril Bank Road, Carlisle CA1 3AJ**
t 01228 227284
e *carlisle.archives@cumberland.gov.uk*
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/carlisle-archive-centre**
Here you'll find material from Carlisle, Keswick, Penrith and Maryport, as well as other parts of historic Cumberland north of the Derwent, in addition to parish registers alongside records of the Diocese of Carlisle, and the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle Cathedral.

Cheshire Archives And Local Studies
w **cheshirearchives.org.uk**
The service looks after some church-court records for Cumbrian parishes in the Diocese of Chester before 1856. However, access is currently closed ahead of moving to two new archive centres in Chester and Crewe; you can follow the progress at **cheshirestoryshared.org**.

Durham University Library Special Collections
a **Palace Green Library, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RN**
t 0191 334 2972
w **libguides.durham.ac.uk/asc-family-history**
The web page above details some of the sources held here, which include wills and marriage bonds for Cumbrian parishes in the Diocese of Durham.

Kendal Archive Centre
a **County Offices, Kendal LA9 4RQ**
t 01539 713540
e *kendal.archives@cumberland.gov.uk*
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/kendal-archive-centre**
The centre covers the former county of Westmorland, as well as holding some records for the Sedbergh-Dent (West Riding of Yorkshire) and Cartmel (Lancashire) districts. It's closed to the public, but its holdings are available in the reading room at Kendal Library (booking required at least 72 hours in advance via the contact details above).

Lancashire Archives
a **Bow Lane, Preston PR1 2RE**
t 01772 533039
e *archives@lancashire.gov.uk*
w **lancashire.gov.uk/libraries-and-archives/archives-and-record-office/**
Although most of the Diocese of Chester collection resides at Cheshire Archives, some records that cover parts of Westmorland can be found here.

West Yorkshire Archive Service
a **West Yorkshire Joint Services, Nepshaw Lane South, Morley LS27 7JQ**
e *archives@wyjs.org.uk*
w **wyjs.org.uk/archive-services/**
The service holds records for the Sedbergh district of Yorkshire, now part of modern Cumbria.

Whitehaven Archive And Local Studies Centre
a **Scotch Street, Whitehaven CA28 7NL**
t 01946 506420
e *whitehaven.archives@cumberland.gov.uk*
w **cumbriaarchives.org.uk/whitehaven-archive-centre**
The centre focuses on the area of West Cumbria bounded by the Derwent in the north and the Duddon in the south.

GROUPS & SOCIETIES

Cumberland And Westmorland Antiquarian And Archaeological Society
w **cumbriapast.com**
The society was founded in 1866. Free resources on its website include a database of Quaker wills and back issues of its journal available to search and view.

Cumbria Family History Society
w **cumbriafhs.com**
The society's website has all sorts of useful guides to sources. More than 600,000 indexed records are freely available via the database at **cumbriafhs.com/indexes/peoplefinder**.

Cumbria Local History Federation
w **clhf.org.uk**
The federation has revamped its site since we last visited the area.

Furness Family History Society
w **furnessfhs.co.uk**
Meetings generally occur on the first Monday of each month at Barrow Island Community Primary School.

MUSEUMS

Cumbria Museum Consortium
w **cumbriamuseums.org.uk**
The consortium runs six heritage attractions in the county.

Cumbria's Museum Of Military Life
a **Alma Block, The Castle, Carlisle CA3 8UR**
t 01228 532774
e *enquiries@cmoml.org*
w **cumbriasmuseumofmilitarylife.org**
Explore local regiments' history.

Lakeland Motor Museum
a **Old Blue Mill, Backbarrow, Ulverston LA12 8TA**
t 015395 30400
e *info@lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk*
w **lakelandmotormuseum.co.uk**
The museum's displays tell the story of the "rich industrial heritage of the Leven Valley".

WEBSITE

North West Sound Heritage
w **northwestsoundheritage.org**
Archives+ at Manchester Central Library is digitising about 15,000 recordings held across the region.

Orphanage applications, 1828–1840

James Hamilton of the Signet Library in Edinburgh shares a set of orphanage applications Interview By Rosemary Collins

The Society of Writers to His Majesty's Signet, better known as the WS Society, is an incorporated body of Scottish solicitors that was founded in 1594. The society owns the neoclassical Signet Library in Edinburgh, which holds a rich collection of records of Scottish history. Here James Hamilton, the library's research principal, shares a set of records from John Watson's Institution that reveal the society's charitable work, and the lives of some of the many orphaned children in 19th-century Scotland.

What Was John Watson's Institution?

John Watson's Institution was a school for orphans opened in Edinburgh in 1828 by the WS Society, one of the oldest bodies of lawyers in the world. It took its name from society member John Watson, who when he died in 1759 left the bulk of his fortune to be used for "Godly Purposes" in Scotland's capital as decided upon by trustees from the society.

The school closed in the 1970s, and its archives are located for the most part at two repositories – the Signet Library, and Edinburgh City Archives (**edinburgh.gov.uk/managing-information/edinburgh-city-archives-1**).

What Are The Forms?

The forms form a discrete section of our part of the archives, and they are the focus of a current research project that is funded by the Old Edinburgh Club's Jean Guild Grants (**oldedinburghclub.org.uk/projects/jean-guild-grants/**). They were compiled on behalf of orphans applying for entry to the school, and we've discovered that the substantial cache we hold represents for the most part those applicants who were successful.

Why Did You Choose Them As Your Gem?

One of the marvellous things about an archive built up by a legal body over several centuries is that it will hold records of people of relatively humble birth who are otherwise often entirely lost to history. But even then, their place can be little more than a single mention of a name or a relationship. The forms provide information of a completely different order.

Here you find not only close detail about the child applying for entry, but information also about their parents and grandparents, and about the lives they lived to bring them up to this point. There are indications in the letters of recommendation that accompany the forms about who in wider society would have been considered to have responsibility for the child, and what sort of social networks of support existed in the early 19th century.

When our research began, we'd expected the applicants to be confined to Edinburgh and the Lothians, but we are encountering forms for children from far wider afield, including most of the other Scottish cities and even parts of England – Newcastle is richly represented.

The circumstances that put a child in the position of an orphan needing the school as a place to live and find support were never likely to be cheering, and while the stories within the forms are told in a professional manner, there is no hiding the relentless difficulties and suffering that the families faced. The forms offer a window into the daily lives of ordinary people, but in periods of crisis rather than normality, which has to be borne in mind. But nevertheless here are the myriad experiences of the early 19th century – the impact of cholera, the dangers of life on board ship, the vagaries of small-business life, tragic industrial accidents, and – time and time again – the temptations and dangers of debt.

The forms offer a window into the lives of ordinary people in periods of crisis

Are The Forms Digitised?

We want to create a searchable database that will enable researchers anywhere in the world to interrogate the information in the forms in the manner of their choosing. It's vital that family historians will be able to locate individuals of interest, but we also want the networks that surround them to become apparent, and the work and professional lives among those involved with the children to be described and explained. The aim is to have this up and running by the end of 2025.

What Other Material Do You Hold?

The collections in our archives can be very roughly

Visit Us

The Signet Library
a Parliament Square, Edinburgh EH1 1RF
t 0131 220 3249
e *library@wssociety.co.uk*
w **wssociety.co.uk/library**

The library is open Monday to Thursday 10am–5pm, and Friday 9am–4.30pm. If you would like to visit the library, please email at least 48 hours in advance with details of your research needs.

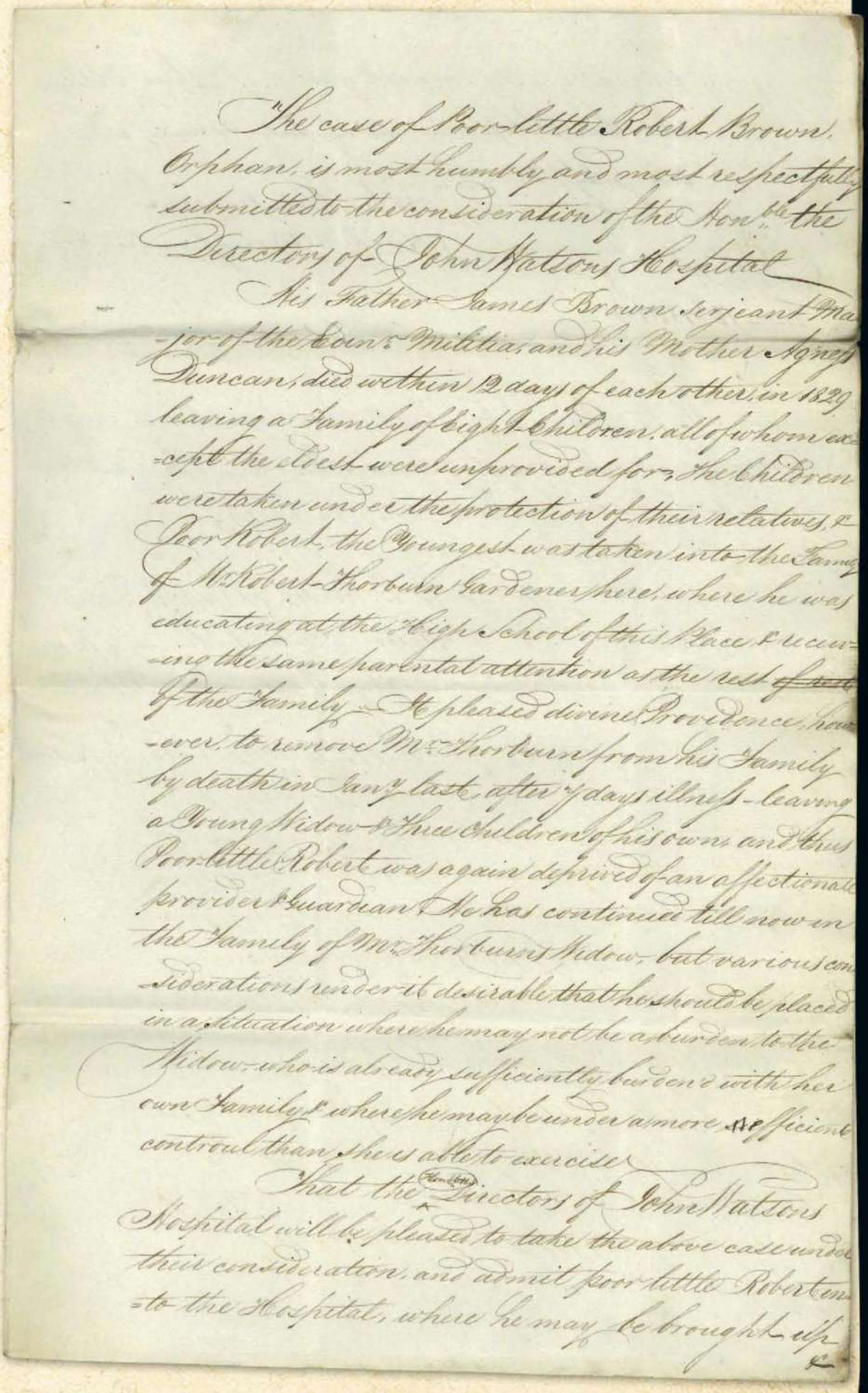
divided into three parts. The largest of these is the records of the society's life and administration since its creation, which are catalogued at the Archives Hub (**archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/data/gb1487-ws**).

These particularly focus on the early training of lawyers, with later professional lives largely confined to the cases of those who went on to hold office within the society.

Second, the neoclassical Signet Library, which the society built, holds unique collections of Scottish books, historic newspapers, maps, manuscripts, music and various ephemera.

We also preserve an enormous collection of legal papers from 18th-century and early 19th-century Scotland, from a time when all human life passed through the supreme civil court in Scotland, the Court of Session. Here is everything from piracy and slavery to disputes over flower boxes – and papers present in the room during the trial of Deacon Brodie, an Edinburgh city councillor whose double life as a burglar inspired Robert Louis Stevenson's famous 1866 novel *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The library's holdings can be searched via the online catalogue at **sign.koha-ptfs.co.uk**.

Finally, the society has always been very involved in charitable activity in Edinburgh and in Scotland more widely, and it is from this third part of the archives that the John Watson's Institution material stems.



The case of Poor little Robert Brown, Orphan, is most humbly and most respectfully submitted to the consideration of the Hon.ble the Directors of John Watsons Hospital

His Father James Brown Serjeant Major of the Lowr Militia, and his Mother Agnes Duncan, died within 12 days of each other, in 1829 leaving a Family of eight Children, all of whom except the eldest were unprovided for. The Children were taken under the protection of their relatives, & Poor Robert, the Youngest was taken into the Family of Mr Robert Thorburn Gardener here, where he was educating at the High School of this Place & receiving the same parental attention as the rest ~~of the~~ of the Family. It pleased divine Providence, however, to remove Mr Thorburn from his Family by death in Jany last, after 7 days illness, leaving a Young Widow & Three Children of his own, and thus Poor little Robert was again deprived of an affectionate provider & Guardian. He has continued till now in the Family of Mrs Thorburn's Widow, but various considerations render it desirable that he should be placed in a situation where he may not be a burden to the Widow, who is already sufficiently burdened with her own Family, & where he may be under a more sufficient controul than she is able to exercise

That the Hon.ble Directors of John Watsons Hospital will be pleased to take the above case under their consideration, and admit poor little Robert into the Hospital, where he may be brought up &c

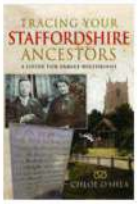
REVIEWS

The latest books on history and genealogy, plus apps, podcasts and websites

Tracing Your Staffordshire Ancestors A Guide For Family Historians

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Chloe O'Shea
Pen & Sword, 216 pages, £15.99



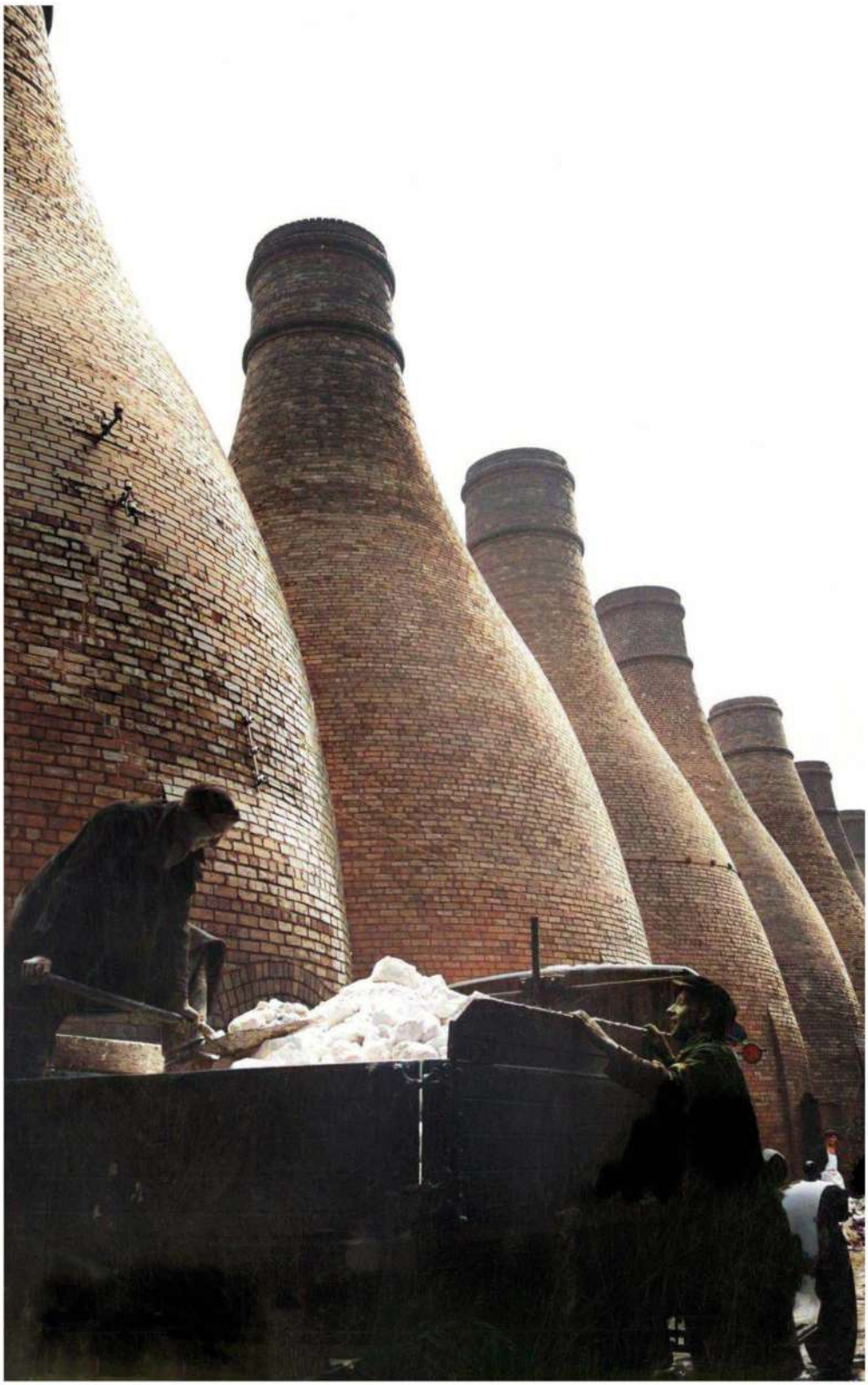
Pen & Sword has become the leading publisher of family history handbooks, with a lengthy list of thematic and geographically focused guides. This latest volume, on Staffordshire, maintains the company's high standard of output. Inevitably, in the firm's county-based titles, there is a substantial proportion of general material that is repeated in each volume – explaining, for example, civil registration or census procedures. There is no escaping this necessity, and it is good to see that here such generalised coverage is well done and effective.

There are some chapters specific to the county, covering Staffordshire surnames, occupations, parishes and museums. A commendably up-to-date section deals with the county's archives, which recently underwent a total restructuring, and it is good to see that the discussion includes the surprisingly numerous West Midlands borough archive centres, and others outside Staffordshire. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is the attention that it gives to the changing geography of local government in the past half century, and the effect on sources and their whereabouts.

The different types of source material are illustrated by relevant examples from the author's own family history. Chloe O'Shea, a regular contributor to *WDYTYA? Magazine*, comes across as experienced and realistic, and you feel that she knows her subject really well. The reader has confidence in her advice.

My Staffordshire ancestors came from the hilly farming country on the western edge of the Peak District, and they are one of the lines that I have rather neglected in the past. Now I am encouraged to do more, and I know that this book will help me.

Alan Crosby lives in Lancashire and is the editor of *The Local Historian*. He also writes a regular column for *WDYTYA? Magazine*



This photograph, which was taken on 4 April 1937, shows a worker clearing ash from a group of bottle kilns in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, the historic centre of the UK's pottery industry

GETTY IMAGES

DIGITAL PICKS

Rosemary Collins highlights three digital resources that caught our eye this month

PODCAST

The Descendants

theguardian.com/australia-news/series/the-descendants

This two-part podcast and accompanying reporting from Guardian Australia uncover the legacy of colonial violence against Indigenous Australians in the 19th and 20th centuries. The first episode discusses colonial settler Major Logue, while the second investigates rumours that Tom Wills, one of the founders of Australian rules football, took part in the massacres of Gayiri Aboriginal people. Free.

RADIO

Speed Of Light

tinyurl.com/bbc-speed-of-light (UK only) or bbc.com

In this five-part series from Radio 4, writer Laura Cumming tells the story of 19th-century photography through the lives of five pioneers. Episodes include Alexander Gardner's images from the American Civil War and Parisian police officer Alphonse Bertillon's creation of the front-and-profile mug shot of criminals. Free.

APP A

For Evermore

iOS and Android

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has launched an app for mobile devices, offering virtual tours of 75 of its cemeteries and memorials around the world. If you're visiting the sites in person, you can use the app to follow a guided tour of key points. You can also use it to explore the sites virtually from home. Free.

HISTORY OF ARCHIVES

An Archive

Edmund de Waal

Ivorypress, 250 pages, £28

Ceramic artist Edmund de Waal is also the author of *The Hare with Amber Eyes*, the bestselling memoir about his family history published in 2010. His new title, described as "a book about archives that is itself archival", is a collection of writings and companion pieces to his work.

The passport of Edmund de Waal's great grandfather Viktor Ephrussi, who fled Austria with his family after the Nazis annexed the country and confiscated their property

"Archives are purposeful and they are random," de Waal writes. Those of us who have inherited an archive from our ancestors know how fragmentary the artefacts left behind by the dead are – often precious, but also random, reflections of their lives that can fall frustratingly short of the whole picture. De Waal's writing, and the accompanying illustrations, is similarly fragmentary, and this book is most of use to people who have read his other work and are familiar with the writers and artists he discusses. But *An Archive* is often beautiful and intriguing. Much of the book is haunted by the worst tragedies of the world, as when he writes about the records of the Holocaust in archives, and his work curating *library of exile*, an art installation of books by 'exiled' authors throughout history.

Rosemary Collins is the features editor of *Who Do You Think You Are? Magazine*

Reader Review YOUR CHANCE TO ASSESS THE LATEST BOOKS

Memories From The Future

FICTION

Helen Baggott, *Stourcastle Books, 234 pages, £7.99*

Here Helen Baggott, author of *Posted in the Past* (2019), builds on her experience of tracing family stories through correspondence to create an unusual novel. *Memories From the Future* tells a dual story: modern-day genealogist Hilary follows the route of an Edwardian Englishman touring Exmoor, using postcards he sent to family and friends. In the course of her travels, Hilary follows clues in Arthur Saville's writings that surprisingly parallel a modern-day pastime, and these lead her on a journey of discovery of the history in each area that she visits. Detailed descriptions of towns and villages along with their buildings, streets and harbours paint an intricate picture, potentially working as a guidebook for visitors to Exmoor.

A map of Exmoor from 1840

I enjoy reading fiction that incorporates different formats, and this book uses narrative, postcards, maps and letters. Especially of interest to me were the author's concluding notes which explain how she constructed the story of Arthur Saville. Her description of the research and writing process is a fascinating glimpse into the work of an accomplished author.

Alison Spring, Glasgow

Alison is a genealogist, writer and speaker. See scotsancestors.blogspot.com for information

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GETTY IMAGES | EDMUND DE WAAL FAMILY ARCHIVE

TV & RADIO

Rosemary Collins previews upcoming programmes on history and family history

Witches Of Essex With Rylan And Prof. Alice Roberts

Sky History and Sky History Play
14 October

Rylan and Prof. Alice Roberts investigate the history of witchcraft in Essex in their new series

Radio DJ and TV presenter Rylan has always been fascinated by history and the supernatural. But he had no idea of the central role his home county of Essex played in one of the most shocking episodes of English history – the persecution of hundreds of women for witchcraft in the 16th and 17th centuries.

To find out more information, Rylan teams up with anthropologist and broadcaster Prof. Alice Roberts. They speak to a variety of experts in history, psychology and medicine to investigate why paranoia about witches became so dangerous during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Ironically, Elizabeth's own mother Anne Boleyn had been targeted with rumours of witchcraft – but when Elizabeth became queen in 1558, she feared that her enemies meant to use magic to kill her. Her Parliament passed the first law making murder by witchcraft a capital offence, and the authorities allowed hostility against alleged witches to spread. The witch trials were even reported freely in chapbooks, the tabloid newspapers of the day.

In an era of rampant superstition and misogyny, those targeted were predominantly women who were poor, widowed, unmarried or otherwise outsiders. Their neighbours, living precariously in rural poverty, often turned to them as scapegoats when something went wrong in their lives.

Each episode of *Witches of Essex* explores a real-life case of alleged witchcraft from the county, brought to life by historical investigation and poignant dramatisations. The first episode focuses on the 1566 trial of three women from the village of Hatfield Peverel – Elizabeth Frauncis, her sister Agnes Waterhouse and Agnes' 18-year-old daughter Joan. The women were accused of conjuring familiars to commune with Satan, and using magic to cause the deaths of local men and even Elizabeth's own baby. They were charged in a trial prosecuted by the queen's attorney-general Gilbert Gerard and the Archdeacon of Essex Thomas Cole, with death by hanging as the penalty.

Remarkably, records show that Agnes was initially defiant despite the enormous pressure against them – but her love for her own daughter was used against her.

Britain's Railway Empire In Colour

Channel 4
Streaming now

September 2025 marked 200 years since the birth of the modern railway. To celebrate, Channel 4 aired this two-part series, bringing to life the story of the railway with newly colourised photos and footage. The first episode tracks how the railways grew from coal trucks in north-east England to transforming the lives of the Victorians. Francis Bourgeois – famous for his trainspotting TikToks – tells the story of his 19th-century equivalent George Tod, who took stunning photos. And if you're a fan of railway history, you'll also want to catch both episodes of *Michael Portillo's 200 Years of the Railways* on BBC iPlayer.

House Of Guinness

Netflix
Streaming now

For millions around the world, a pint of Guinness is deeply associated with Ireland. This new drama from *Peaky Blinders* creator Steven Knight digs into the true story behind the famous brewing company. The story begins in 1868, following the death of the family's patriarch, Sir Benjamin Guinness. In a plot that plays out like *Succession* in 19th-century Dublin, his adult children Arthur (Anthony Boyle), Edward (Louis Partridge), Anne (Emily Fairn) and Ben (Fionn O'Shea) must navigate their shares of his legacy and work to make the family business even bigger.

The House At Number 48

Radio 4 and BBC Sounds
13 October

In this new documentary series, journalist Charlie Northcott meets Antony Easton. Antony reveals how he discovered that his father Peter was born Peter Eisner to a wealthy German Jewish family. When the family had to flee the Nazis, they lost everything – so does Antony have a right to his family's looted art and assets? *The House at Number 48* tells an extraordinary story, both about the impact of the Holocaust and about the ways our parents can be mysterious to all of us.

Battle Treasures With Foxy And Bruce

Sky History and Sky History Play
28 October

In *Battle Treasures*, presenters Jason Fox *(SAS: Who Dares Wins)* and Bruce Crompton *(Combat Dealers)* look at the stories behind some of the rarest and most remarkable artefacts from military history. Highlights include a Sword of Honour belonging to Sir John Moore, famed for his heroic death at the 1809 Battle of Corunna in Spain, and a blade owned by Tantia Tope, one of the leading figures in the Indian Rebellion of 1857.

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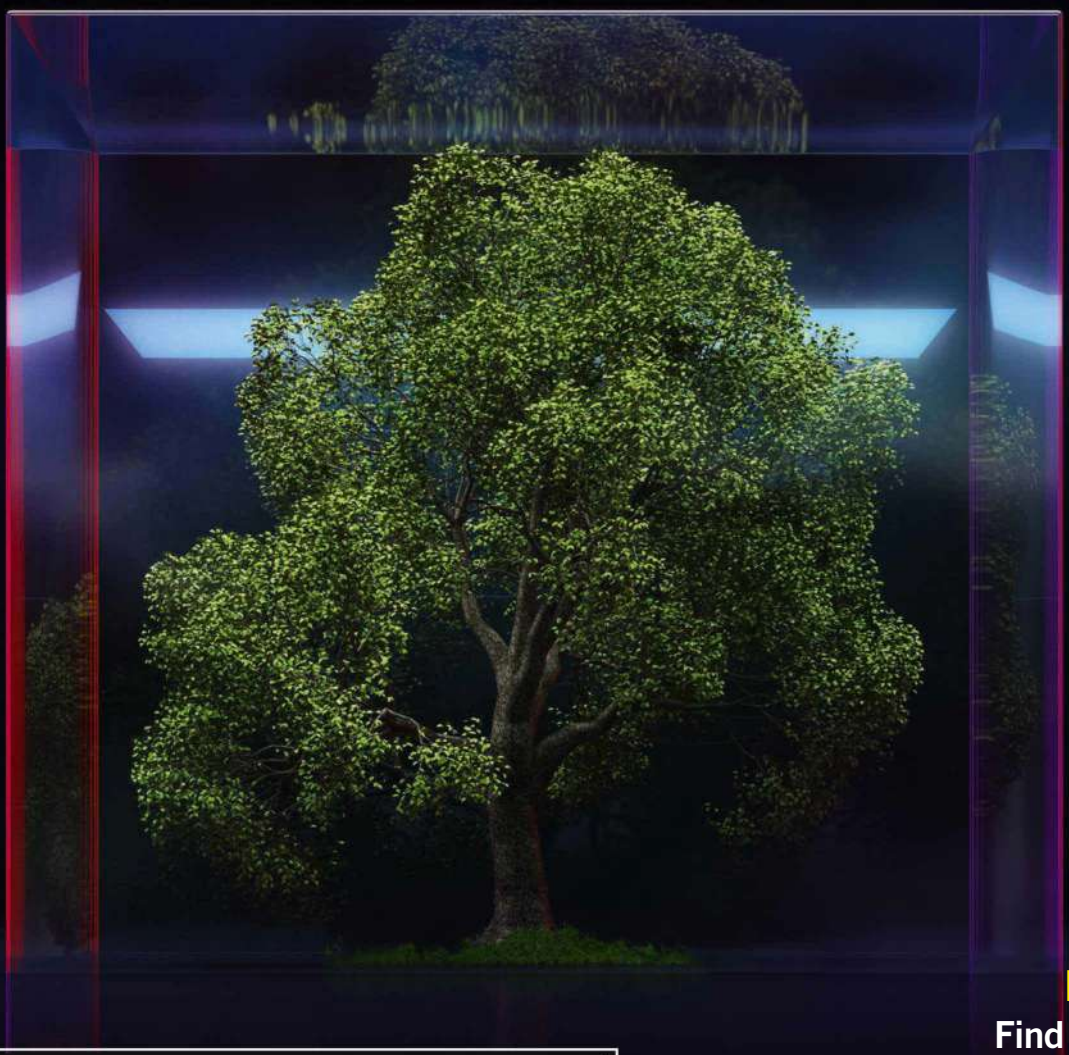

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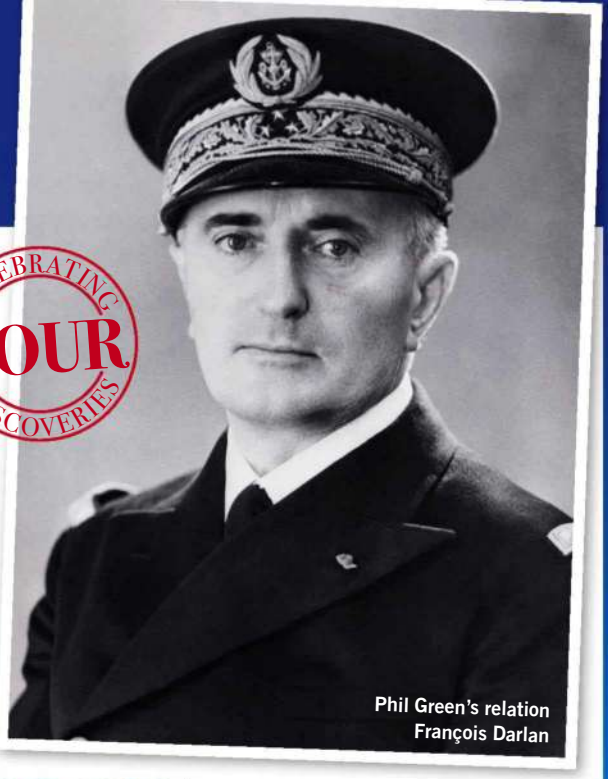

Phil Green's relation François Darlan

François Darlan has been described as a traitor to France, but other historians see him as a pragmatic statesman. His relative Phil Green spoke to **Gail Dixon**

History is rarely a straightforward matter of heroes and villains, as Phil Green knows only too well.

"My mother Maryvonne Plurien was French, and when I was a child we used to spend summers in Toulon, Provence, in the south-east of the country with my grandmother Lucie," he remembers. "The bright light and colour, and the red geraniums, stay with me to this day.

"I began researching the French side of my family last year, building a tree from Lucie's Hamon relatives.

"My great grand uncle Yves Hamon was a rear admiral in the French Navy. His daughter Annie married a man called Alain Darlan, which rang a bell. After some digging, I realised that Alain was the son of Admiral François Darlan, which blew my mind.

"Admiral Darlan was famous during the Second World War as a military and political leader. Why wasn't I told of this by relations?"

François Darlan was born in 1881 in the Lot-et-Garonne department of south-west France, and his family had strong naval links. He graduated from France's naval academy in 1902 and became an officer, serving in the First World War and rising swiftly through the ranks. He was appointed admiral and chief of the naval staff in 1937.

As war loomed, Darlan recognised that the French Navy needed urgent expansion. "He built up the navy to become one of the largest in the world, and he was immensely proud of it." In 1939, Darlan was promoted to admiral of the fleet, commanding the navy at the outbreak of war.

Germany invaded France in 1940 and, despite professing himself to be anti-fascist, Darlan joined Marshal Pétain's government in Vichy France, the notorious state that collaborated with the Nazis. During the war, Vichy France sent thousands of Jewish people to their deaths in concentration camps.

Darlan was an opportunist who held the real reins of power in Vichy France

Darlan was the state's vice-premier and commander-in-chief of the military forces. He was widely seen as Pétain's successor, and was photographed with Göring, Rommel and Hitler himself. Despite collaborating, Darlan promised Winston Churchill that no French ship would fall into German hands.

"Many people considered Darlan to be a traitor. However, in recent times historians have seen him as more of a pragmatist. He believed Germany would win, so he collaborated to safeguard French interests after the war."

In 1942, Darlan visited Algeria in French North Africa, only days before Allied forces invaded the area. He was captured in the country's capital Algiers, and decided to switch allegiance. General Dwight D Eisenhower, the Allied commander, recognised Darlan as commander of French forces in North Africa, and the two men agreed to cooperate.

Pétain was furious, and stripped Darlan of his offices in Vichy France. Simultaneously, German forces moved to occupy the puppet state, which put the French Navy at risk of capture.

In November 1942, Darlan ordered the scuttling of 75 warships at the main naval base at Toulon, to prevent their imminent capture by the Germans. He also ordered the rest of the French fleet be handed to the Allies.

Darlan was assassinated while serving in Algiers on 24 December 1942 by anti-Vichyiste and monarchist Fernand Bonnier de La Chapelle, who was executed for the deed two days later.

"It has been difficult to process our family connection to Darlan. He built up the French Navy, and prevented its capture by the Germans. However, he was also an opportunist who held the real reins of power in Vichy France. Family shame at being related to a man seen as a traitor was probably the reason why his name was never mentioned."

Toulon, where Phil used to enjoy idyllic holidays, now holds fresh significance in his family history thanks to his research into Darlan's eventful life.

PHIL GREEN lives in Worcester and is a retired freshwater biologist

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